The NIMH file

EDITORIAL NIBBLINGS

BY TIMOTHY FAY

Greetings! Welcome to THE NIMH FILE, a special one-shot APAzine featuring stories and art inspired by the book MRS. FRISBY AND THE RATS OF NIMH by Robert C. O'Brien, and THE SECRET OF NIMH, by the Don Bluth Studio. It was almost exactly four years ago that THE SECRET OF NIMH was released to movie theaters across America. While garnering some impressive critical acclaim, the film did not quite live up to expectations at the box office. It has, however, found a second life in the home video/cable TV markets, where it has earned a reputation as a fine and popular family film (THE SECRET OF NIMH was recently shown on The Disney Channel, and is still aired from time to time on HBO, Showtime, Cinemax, and other cable services). It was shortly after the premier of NIMH that I first discovered how strongly and how deeply the film had influenced some people. THE SECRET OF NIMH was released at about the same time as Disney's TRON, and a number of articles appeared comparing the two films (both were made by what could be called the "new generation" of Disney animators). I couldn't help making similar comparisons, and developed an idea for a tongue-in-cheek "sequel" that combined elements from both TRON and NIMH. Not long after, I met an artist at a convention in Chicago who was planning a serious, full-blown sequel to the book and the film (he even had some rough sketches and finished artwork, though he was unable to contribute anything to this APA). As time went on, I came across several other artists and writers who had their own stories involving these very special mice and rats, and I decided that perhaps it would be a good idea to gather together as many of them as possible, and thus THE NIMH FILE was born.

And now, a little bit about the contributors featured in THE NIMH FILE: The first story, VIDEO NIMH, is by your humble editor, and is not really meant to be taken all that seriously. As I said, it is a slightly twisted tribute to both THE SECRET OF NIMH and TRON, and I hope the reader will find it enjoyable. Next is an exerpt from a 210-page novel -- a full blown sequel to MRS. FRISBY AND THE RATS OF NIMH/THE SECRET OF NIMH -- written by Gregg Anderson. I wish I had the space to reprint the entire manuscript, but I hope the selections I've picked will give the reader a good idea of the feel and mood of this interesting work. Next are two illos by Mike Waltz (more on Mike, later). After that is the largest single contribution to the APA, David A. Leemhuis' novelette, MRS. BRISBY AND THE SEARCH FOR JONATHAN. I hope David didn't go bankrupt printing this up for us! After David's story, we have a contribution from John Speidel, who draws the comic strip "Steppinwolf" for the Comics Buyers' Guide, and a drawing from Tom Linehan. Next is THE STONE, by Juan Alfonso. Juan was clued into this project by David Leemhuis -- word gets around, doesn't it? Thank you both, David and Juan. Next is perhaps my favorite contribution, MEMORIES OF NIMH, by Pete Krause. Pete is a local cartoonist who, along with Mike Waltz and myself, had some of his work published in ENTROPY TALES #1. ENTROPY TALES is an independent comic book that we published (along with editors Alan Payne and Paul Ewert) last May. It can be found at most of the better comic book specialty shops in the U.S. and Canada. Our second issue should be out in September. Getting back to THE NIMH FILE: After Pete's story is THE EMULATOR by Charles Garofalo. I've seen Charles' writing elsewhere, and this fine little thriller is the kind of quality work I've come to expect from him. Keep an eye on this fellow! Then there's an illo by Steve Scharff, and a short story from Colleen Winters (both friends of mine, and two very interesting and creative people). Next, we have THE REAL SECRET by Jim Korkis. Jim is a mild-mannered high school English teacher from California. When he's not out fighting crime and injustice, he writes (mostly about comics and animation history), occasionally draws, juggles, tells jokes, performs, and is one heck of a nice guy (take your bow, Jim -- now get outta here, ya crazy guy). After that, we have a short article by the Fox, known to us humans as John Cawley, Jr. A lot of you may know John, as he used to be Production Coordinator at Sullivan Studios, which is where Don Bluth and company are currently located (more about that,

later). Many of you who wrote to Bluth probably got a reply from Mr. Cawley. John gives us an interesting essay on some of the questions raised by fans of THE SECRET OF NIMH (the reader should take particular note of "The Hidden NIMH"). Next is a bit of speculative fiction by Georgia artist, Robert Haynie. And last, but certainly not least, is JASPER, SON OF JEREMY: "A Crow on the Wing", by Tracy Horton. Tracy is a student at the CalArts animation school, where many of the Bluth and Disney people were trained. And let's not forget those covers! A special thanks goes to Philo Barnhart, one of the key character assitants on THE SECRET OF NIMH, who drew and designed the front cover, and Messers LaFong and Jeeves, who did the art for the back cover. And an extra special thanks to Jerry Beck, who provided us with sets of NIMH postcards, and issues #1 and #2 of the original SECRET OF NIMH newsletters. All in all, a fine issue, and a fine tribute to a wonderful book and film. Thanks to all of you for making THE NIMH FILE a success!

And what of Don Bluth Productions? Well, as many of you know, the studio got involved with several laserdisc videogame projects ("Dragon's Lair", "Space Ace", and "Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp"), but encountered some financial difficulties (which prevented the release of "Time Warp"). The studio no longer exists, but most of the Bluth group, including Don Bluth, John Pomeroy, and Gary Goldman, are now working for Morris Sullivan, and are now known as Sullivan Studios. Sullivan, with backing from Steven Spielburg, is producing an animated feature called AN AMERICAN TAIL. According to articles in the trade papers, TAIL is about a family of mice who immigrate to America, and their adventures in their new home (the film ties-in with the centennial of the Statue of Liberty). Look for it in the theaters around Thanksgiving. We wish all the people at Sullivan Studios the best of luck this this film, and continued success in their future projects.

And now, on with THE NIMH FILE!

TABLE OF CONTENTS :

TITLE/AUTHOR	# OF PAGES
Editorial Nibblings by Timothy Fay	2
Video NIMH, by Timothy Fay	14
Exerpts from Odyssey to Thorn Valley, by Gregg Anderson	5
Teresa and Jeremy by Mike Waltz	2
Mrs. Brisby and the Search for Jonathan, by David Leemhuis	48
Top Hat and Tails, by John Speidel	1
Mrs. Brisby and Child, by Tom Linehan	1
The Stone, by Juan Alfonso	5
Memories of NIMH, by Peter G. Krause	4
The Emulator, by Charles Garofalo	9
Illo by Steve Scharff	1
The Secret of Yamato, by Colleen Winters	2
The Real Secret, by Jim Korkis	2
NIMH Notes #1: "Questions and Answers" by John Cawley	5
And Sometimes I Wish, by Robert Haynie	2
Jasper, Son of Jeremy: "A Crow on the Wing", by Tracy Horton	6

Front cover designed and drawn by Philo Barnhart.

Back cover by Carl LaFong and M. K. Jeeves.

NIMH postcards and newsletters courtesy of Jerry Beck. NIMH membership cards courtesy of John Cawley.

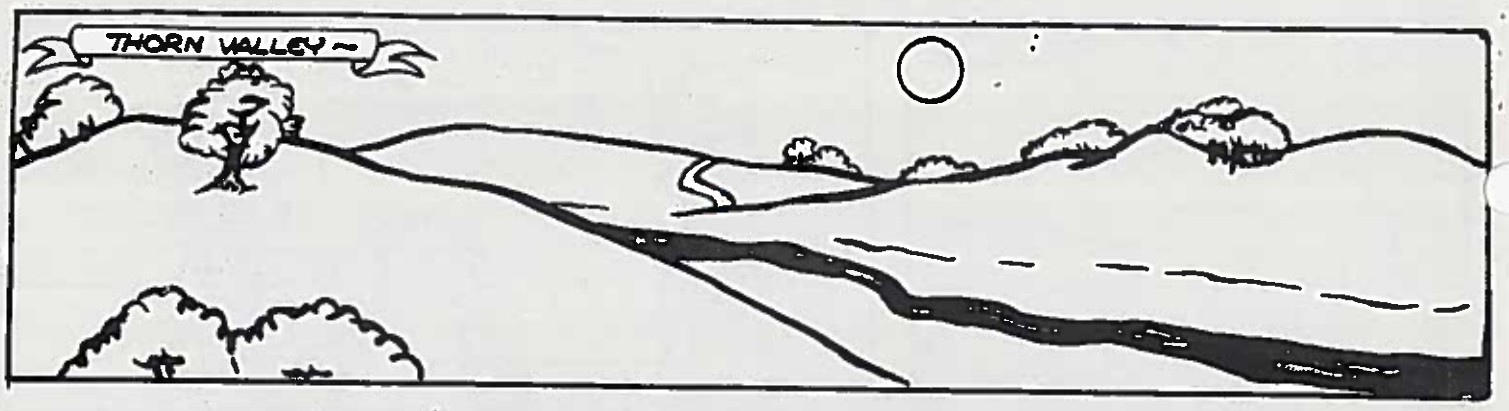
THE NIMH FILE #1, June 1986. Edited and compiled by Timothy D. Fay.

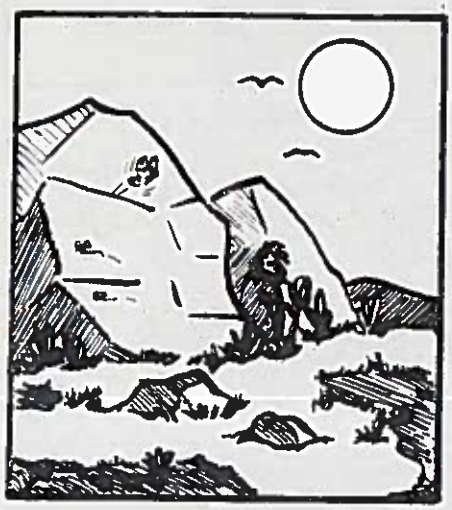
THE NIMH FILE is a not-for-profit, independent fan project, and is in no way connected with Don Bluth Productions, Mrs. Brisby, Ltd., Aurora, MGM/UA, or the estate of Robert O'Brien, and is not intended to infringe on any copyrights held by the above. All other copyrights, where applicable, on the works presented in this anthology revert back to the individual creators upon publication.

PROLOG: THE BRISBY HOME ON THE FITZGIBBONS' FARM...
HEY, MOM! TIMMY'S GONNA GET THE HIGH SCORE ON SPACE MARAUDERS!!
THE COMPUTER JUSTIN & THE RATS GAVE US IS REALLY GREAT!!
YES, CHILDREN, IT'S A WONDERFUL GIFT. COME NOW, SUPPER'S ALMOST READY.
C'MON, TIMOTHY!
IN A MINUTE...
AAAH!!
GASP
TIMOTHY!!
T-TIMOTHY...
MOM!
He
HAHAHAA

VIDEO NIMH

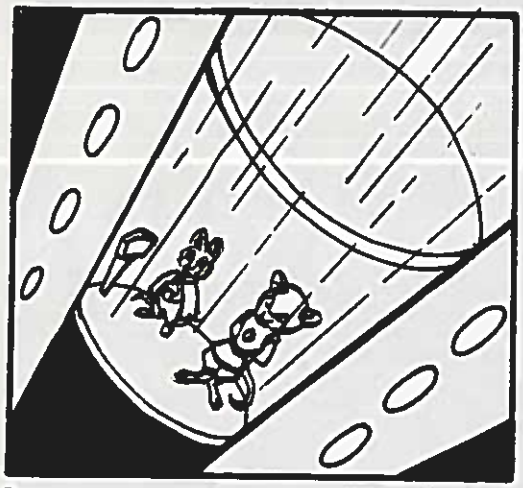
STORY AND ART BY
TIMOTHY FAY


THORN VALLEY ~

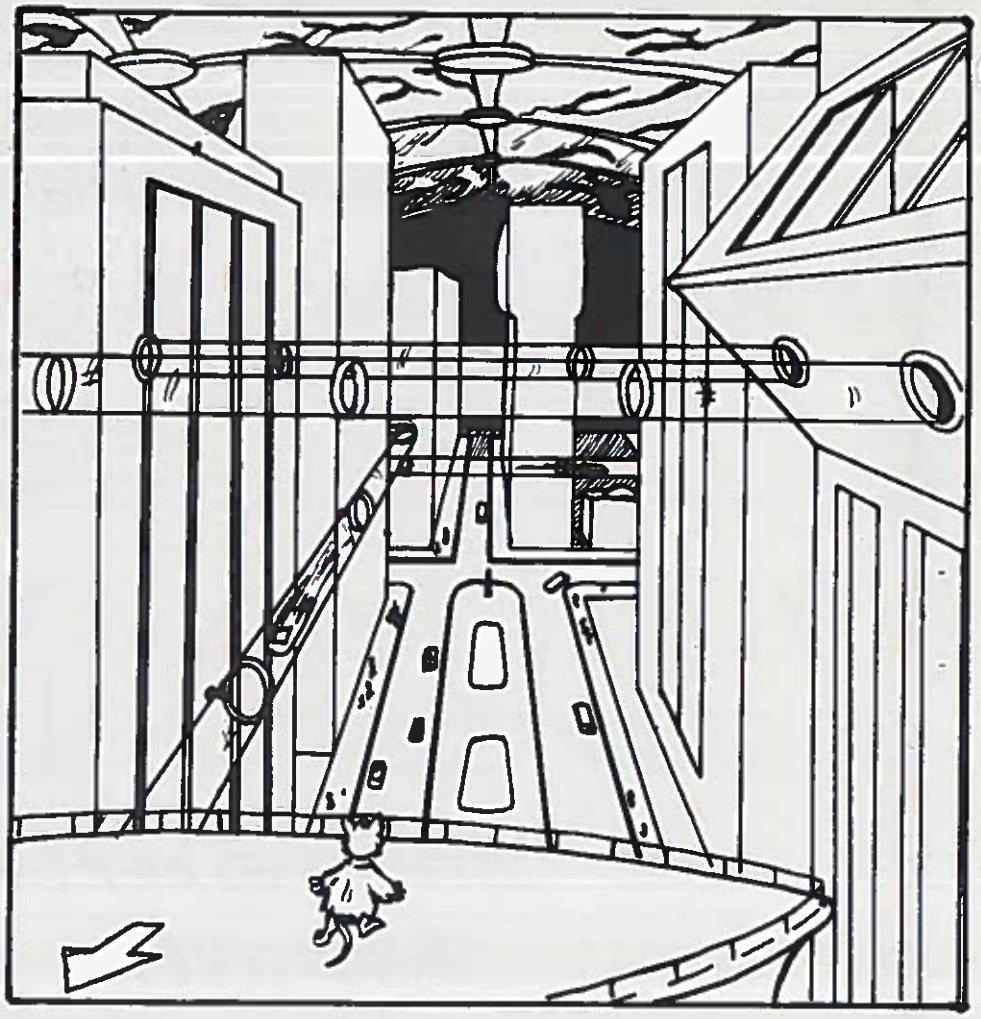


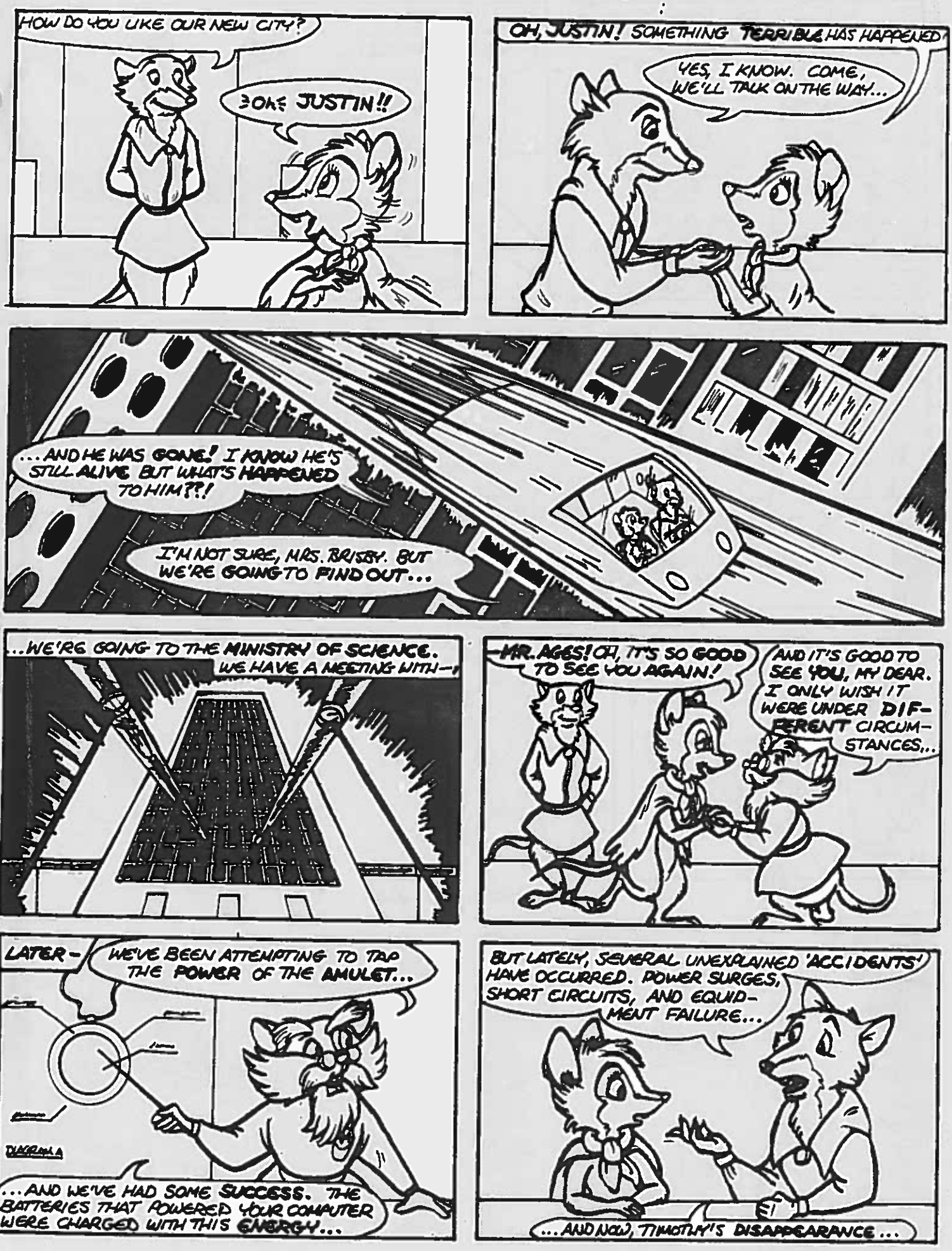
HALT! IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

HEY! DON'T YOU KNOW WHO THAT IS!
Oh! PARDON ME, MRS. BRISBY... THIS WAY, PLEASE.

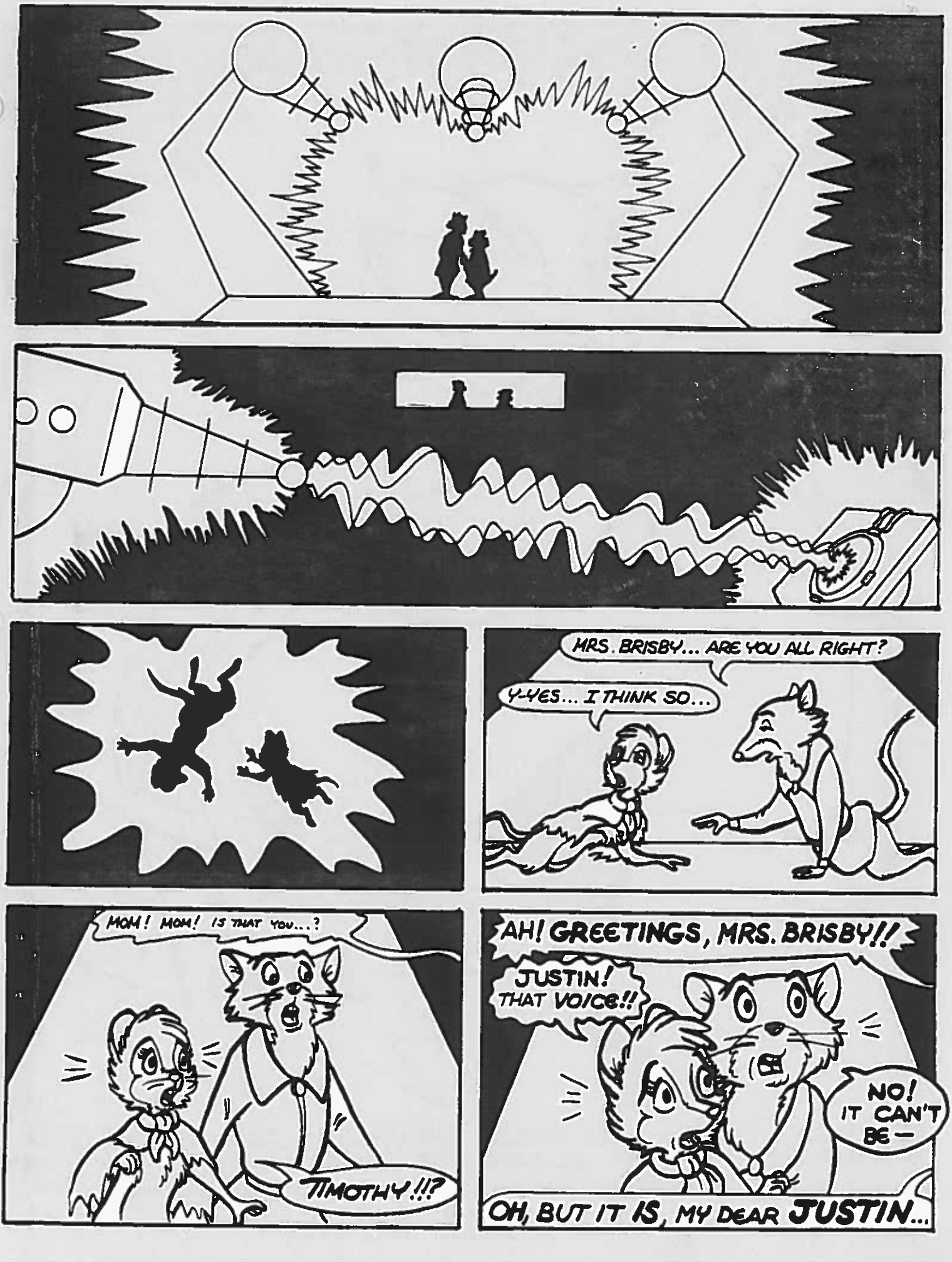


!




HOW DO YOU LIKE OUR NEW CITY?
OOH! JUSTIN!!
OH, JUSTIN! SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED!
YES, I KNOW. COME, WE'LL TALK ON THE WAY...
...AND HE WAS GONE! I KNOW HE'S STILL ALIVE BUT WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM?!
I'M NOT SURE, MRS. BRISBY. BUT WE'RE GOING TO FIND OUT...
...WE'RE GOING TO THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE. WE HAVE A MEETING WITH—
MR. AGES! OH, IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
AND IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, MY DEAR. I ONLY WISH IT WERE UNDER DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES...
LATER—
WE'VE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO TAP THE POWER OF THE AMULET...
DIAGRAM A
...AND WE'VE HAD SOME SUCCESS. THE BATTERIES THAT POWERED YOUR COMPUTER WERE CHARGED WITH THIS ENERGY...
BUT LATELY, SEVERAL UNEXPLAINED 'ACCIDENTS' HAVE OCCURRED. POWER SURGES, SHORT CIRCUITS, AND EQUIPMENT FAILURE...
...AND NOW, TIMOTHY'S DISAPPEARANCE...

YES... AND JUST THREE DAYS AGO, AN EXPLOSION KILLED TWO OF MY BEST STUDENTS...
OH!! I'M SO SORRY!
ISN'T THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO?!
YES! WE HAVE THIS— AN EXPERIMENTAL TRANSMAT DEVICE!
IT IS OUR PLAN TO TELEPORT A PARTY OF RATS INSIDE THE STONE, IN ORDER TO INVESTIGATE THIS MYSTERY!
BUT IT HASN'T BEEN FULLY TESTED YET. I'VE VOLUNTEERED TO GO FIRST.
THEN I MUST GO, TOO!!
NO!! ABSOLUTELY NOT! IT IS FAR TOO DANGEROUS!!
MR. AGES, YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT MY CHILDREN, AND HOW IMPORTANT THEY ARE --TO ALL OF US...
SIGH I SEE YOUR POINT, MRS. BRISBY.
COLLEEN, PREPARE THE EQUIPMENT.
YES, MR. AGES
MINUTES LATER..
ARE YOU READY?
READY WHEN YOU ARE
VERY WELL, THEN. GOOD LUCK, YOU TWO...
ZZZZKT!
ZZZZKT!


MRS. BRISBY... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
Y-YES... I THINK SO...
MOM! MOM! IS THAT YOU...?
TIMOTHY!!?
AH! GREETINGS, MRS. BRISBY!!
JUSTIN! THAT VOICE!!
NO! IT CAN'T BE—
OH, BUT IT IS, MY DEAR JUSTIN...

WILL JUSTIN, TIMOTHY, + MRS. BRISBY SURVIVE??! IS THIS THE END OF THE RATS OF NIMH?!! BE SURE NOT TO MISS THE NERVE-SHATTERING CONCLUSION OF VIDEO-NIMH -- TO BE PUBLISHED EXCLUSIVELY IN—

The NIMH File!!

The following is an excerpt from Gregg Anderson's 210-page sequel to Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, titled Odyssey to Thorn Valley:

ODYSSEY TO THORN VALLEY

PROLOGUE: The Chronicles of NIMH

It is a small room, with deep shadows hiding the details of its walls and furnishings. A shape is silhouetted by the glow of candles set atop a cluttered desk. On the walls can be seen the dim outlines of pictures, the smooth, stone surfaces otherwise unadorned. Only one picture can be seen clearly. It's a portrait of Nicodemus, first leader of the Rats of NIMH. Slowly a hand reaches out to the desk top and picks up a quill pen. An unusual hand, it has long slender fingers which are tipped by small, sharp claws. Even more unusual is that the hand is covered by a soft, brown fur which disappears into the open cuff of a blue jacket sleeve. The hand dips the quill into a small ink-pot and begins to write with flowing letters onto a large, open book atop the desk. As the words appear on each page, a voice speaks softly. A gentle, compassionate voice, it none the less has within it the strength of command, of leadership. It is the voice of Justin, present leader of the Rats of NIMH.

"Its been well over two years now since we left our home in the Rose Bush, and began our journey here. Over eight years since our escape from the cages and cruelty of NIMH. Our journey to Thorn Valley was difficult, but successful. Everyone arrived safely and in unexpectedly good spirits. Nicodemus would have been proud of the work we've done here, of the progress we've made. Our numbers have steadily grown, from the bare handful that we began with we now number well over a hundred. And best of all, the changes that NIMH made in us have proven permanent, with our children inheriting all that we have gained. Already the colony is feeding itself from our fields, and the second harvest will soon be complete. No longer do we have to steal electricity from humans, our dam will provide all the electricity we should ever need. I tried to stay with the Plan, and delay building the dam until later when the Plan called for it. However the council decided to go ahead with it and I was overruled. Still it hasn't seemed to have hurt our progress greatly. The dam was our greatest challenge, and our greatest triumph. Though even with pulling workers from the fields and delaying work on the colony, it took almost a year to finish. It should last for years, or at the very least until we no longer have need of it. The caves that Nicodemus discovered have proven perfect for the colony, already they have become our new home. And best of all, in addition to being warm and dry, they are large enough to give us plenty of expansion room for years."

Justin pauses and looks up at the portrait over the desk. He speaks without writing, setting both hand and pen atop the desk. "Nicodemus, we miss you old friend. You were more than just a leader or a teacher to us. You were our inspiration, our giver of hope. The Plan was yours from its very beginning. All we have done is follow it, though sometimes not too well I fear. I'll never be able to forgive myself for not stopping Jenner until it was too late. If only I had realized just how evil he truly was, perhaps I could have done something." Justin pauses, looking down at the large book before him before he continues. "I do miss you, just as we both missed Jonathan Brisby after he was killed by Dragon. We owed so much to him, and to his widow as well. You weren't there when she warned us that NIMH had learned we were hiding in the Rose Bush, and was coming to kill us all. Or worse, to recapture us and put back in those terrible cages again. Without her, I hate to think what would have happened to all of us. It seems strange how things happen, first Jonathan frees us from NIMH, then his widow saves us from them again." Justin smiles sadly and shakes his head. "I often wish that Mrs Brisby and her family could have come with us to the valley, but they couldn't. Even if her youngest boy Timothy hadn't been so ill I doubt that she could have left her home in the garden. Especially once it was moved to where it was safely behind the stone." Justin again picks up the quill, his smile becoming more grim. "Well, back to the job at hand."

Again he begins to write in the book. "Archimedes has continued Nicodemus' research into the changes that NIMH made in us. While he has made great progress, he fears that he will never rediscover all the knowledge that died with Nicodemus. There was an accident in his laboratory yesterday. A field mouse who had been helping him was badly injured. It seems that while Archimedes was somewhere else, the mouse (Gregory) began experimenting with some equipment that he shouldn't have. Archimedes isn't sure just what happened, but apparently one of the devices short-circuited somehow, and the backlash struck Gregory. It erased his mind of everything that made him who and what he was. Gregory was living in the valley when we first arrived here, and was rather well liked by virtually everyone. He was always trying to help us, and while there really wasn't much he could do his eagerness and desire to help had won him the friendship of the entire colony. Unfortunatly, there has been no change in his condition since the accident, and both Archimedes and Ages say that unless a miracle happens, he will soon die. There seems little else for us to do but wait and hope for the best, and perhaps pray for that miracle. Still, I fear that we have lost yet another friend.

Justin sets the quill down beside the book and sighs, glancing up to the portrait. "Gregory's accident makes me think of Mrs Brisby and her family. I can't help but wonder how they're doing now." He stands and starts to leave the room, then stops and reaches up to the gold and ruby amulet about his neck. Grasping it for a moment, he lifts it and its golden chain from his shoulders. He holds it in front of him, looking at it as it rests in his palm. "Mrs Brisby gave this to me just before we left for Thorn Valley. She said that it would do more good for us here than if she had kept it, and that she didn't feel right in keeping it. In a way she was right, because it has helped us. It has served as a reminder to all of us of Nicodemus and his dreams for us. His dreams of our self-sufficency and independence from the world of humans." As Justin finishes his comment he places the amulet atop a small shelf above the desk, its chain hanging down to almost touch the open page of the great book. He looks down at the amulet, then to the book, then at last up to the portrait of Nicodemus. He gives a small, sad smile at the face in the portrait, "Goodnight old friend, may your sleep be peaceful, and your dreams happy ones." With this Justin turns and walks out of the small room, shutting the loosely boarded door behind him.

After he has left, the room is quiet and, except for the candles, dark. Then slowly, the amulet begins to gently glow. At first it is little more than a dim ember of red deep within the great ruby-like stone, but as the seconds pass it grows until the entire stone is ablaze with crimson fire. With the growth of the amulet's power there comes the sound of soft and distant music, a gentle haunting sound. It brings to mind a vast choir singing in the distance. As the amulet's light increases, it spreads to illuminate first the book, then the portrait, until at last the candles themselves seem dim. Suddenly the candles seem to flicker and dim, their flames vanishing into thin whisps of smoke. As the flames die, the crimson glow seems to concentrait around the pages of the great book. The book trembles slightly, and slowly, deliberately its pages begin to close. Faster and faster they flip until at last the cover itself slams shut. The air seems to vibrate slightly for a moment, mixing with the soft gentle song of the amulet. Then the aura slowly dims, and with it the haunting music.

First the walls vanish into the surrounding darkness, then the desk with the now closed book atop it follows as well. Still the amulet dims, until at last only the amulet itself and the portrait of Nicodemus above are visible. Then the light within the amulet vanishes completely, and the room is enclosed in darkness. Yet somehow, in the last moments of light, a change seems to have come over the portrait. The stern, powerful features of Nicodemus have altered. Where before he had looked out with strength and wisdom on his features, he now seems to have a slight smile, as though approving of what he has seen.

The odyssey to Thorn Valley begins as Timothy and Martin sneak into the knapsack of a man, named Greg, who is on his way to Thorn Valley via the Fitzgibbons' farm. When Greg arrives at Thorn Valley, he discovers a small dam that was built by the Rats of NIMH. But before he can tell anyone about his discovery, he is bitten by a poisonous snake, and now lies unconscious on the ground. Timothy and Martin rush off for help, and return with Mr. Ages, Justin, Archimedes, and the Rats of NIMH. They are about to use the power of the Amulet in an attempt to save his life:

"It's Magic!"

Surprised expressions appear on both Timothy and Martin's faces. "It's magic." Martin says.

"No, not magic, well not quite anyway. Nicodemus thought it was....."

At this point, Archimedes calls to Justin from where the rats have gathered. "Justin, we need you over here, we're about ready to start." Justin looks over to him, nods his head and turns back to the mice. As he does so, he notices someone coming up in the distance. Smiling now, he speaks to the two young mice. "Excuse me, I've got to go help. But I leave you in very good hands." He turns and starts to leave, but after a few steps he turns back to the mice. "If you want to, some prayers wouldn't hurt his chances any." With this he turns and hurries over to the rats. They have formed themselves in a circle, hands held one to another, around the body of the man. Beside him, inside the circle, the body of a mouse lays in a small makeshift litter. He is very still, his breathing slow and constant, but showing no reaction to all that is going on around him. This is Gregory, one time friend and helper to the rats of NIMH, now, an empty shell without a future, and stripped of its past.

Justin steps into the circle next to Archimedes and they begin speaking to each other in hushed tones. Then as instructions are passed down the long line of rats Timothy and Martin hear something move right behind them. Turning about as one, the mice see that it is another mouse who has joined them. This mouse is different from both the boys and Gregory, he is an old mouse, so old that his once brown fur is now an even white all over his body. No one knows how old he really is, except that he had been an old mouse when he and the boy's father had escaped from NIMH with the rats. Yet for all his years, only his appearance and voice showed his age. Somehow, he retained an air of youth about him, an air of youth and a well known short temper. Known only as Mr Ages, he had served as a doctor to the creatures of the farm and garden before coming to Thorn Valley with the rats. Now, dressed in his familiar lab apron and thick glasses perched on his muzzle, he stands before the two young mice as Timothy exclaims. "Mr Ages! Where were you?"

Not wanting to let them know that he's happy to see them, Mr Ages' gruff and irritable voice replies; "I was helping them get ready, I planned to come over and see you but I was just too buisy. After all, you can't expect me to drop everything and come running just because you two show up can you?"

Ignoring his question, Timothy asks; "Will he be alright, Mr Ages? He was nice to us, I've never heard of a human actually being nice to a mouse before, but he was nice to us. Will he be okay?"

"I don't know, it's up to Archimedes and Justin now, there's nothing more either of you can do to help him."

"No Mr Ages, there is one more thing we can do to help." Saying this, Timothy looks at Martin, and they both sit down. Bowing their heads, they put their hands together and quietly, begin to pray. As they begin, Mr Ages looks surprised at first, then as they start to speak, he too bows his head, saying nothing to interrupt them. "Dear God, please....."

At this point Justin and Archimedes have finished their preparations. Looking up and down the circle as far as he can see, Archimedes calls out. "All right, everyone knows what to do. Now quiet down, I said QUIET DOWN!" With this the soft babble of voices fades, and all of the rats look at each other, uncertain of what they are about to do. Then, as Justin clears his throat, all look up to Archimedes as he pauses and says; "All right, ready,..... begin."

As one, the encircling rats take a deep breath and close their eyes, a look of intense concentration appears on each face, and their bodies stiffen under the strain. For long seconds, nothing seems to happen. Then, slowly, above the head of each rat, a soft dim red glow becomes visible. The gentle glows hang motionless for a moment, pulsating gently before gradually each merges with the one beside it. They continue to merge and grow untill there is a ring of translucent ruby above the rats. As the ring of fire slowly grows in strength, a sound can be heard growing with it. Faint at first, then growing in volume, it brings to mind like a distant male choir singing in deep, wordless harmony. It is the sound of the rats, of their minds and souls all working together for a common purpose. With the appearance of the strange music, the aura begins to firm, becoming an almost solid thing, illuminating the small figures beneath it. The soft glow seems to hang in the air above the group, pulsating softly, slowly. One by one the rats open their eyes, and within each eye is visible a dim red glow, growing stronger with each passing second. Above them, the glow slowly intensifies, and waves of brilliance begin moving from all directions towards the stiff figures of Justin and Archimedes. As these waves strengthen in both intensity and speed, Archimedes and Justin stiffen still more, pain appearing on their features, fighting to break their concentration. Abruptly the aura seems to stabilize, holding to a constant level, in a great, glowing circle around the man and over the rats.

Archimedes snaps open his eyes with a jerk, and in a loud and strained voice calls out; "Now!". With this, and without seeming to loose strength elsewhere, the aura begins to focus around his head as the rats all turn to stare in his direction. As this happens, Archimedes and Justin close their eyes for a moment, concentrating on what they must do. Then, together, they open their eyes and stare at the human before them, their brows wrinkled in effort. The aura around them then begins to reach outwards from them, slowly at first, as though unsure of its movements, it grows untill it becomes a great, softly glowing ball of brillance, hanging over the motionless forms below. It then begins to widen, to spread, until at last it forms a vast radiant dome over the entire group. Once created, the dome seems to pulsate, to breathe, once, twice, three times it does this. And with each breath, it grows in strength and depth. As it grows, so grows the accompaning eerie music, filling the clearing with sound as the dome fills it with crimson light. Then the dome begins to shrink, not so much in size, but in shape. Where before it had given the impression of great thickness and depth, it now seemed to thin, to harden as it slowly lowers itself onto the two still forms below. Abruptly the aura intensifies, becoming an almost crystalline shell, surrounding the human and mouse within. At that moment, the man's ragged breathing grows even more erratic, slows, and ceases entirely. For a brief moment, nothing moves, nothing happens. But for the eerie music there is no sound. Then, without warning, within the red aura a second aura begins to grow around the man's motionless form. A harsh, brilliant

crystal blue, it gathers itself into a ball of stabbing brilliance and begins to rise from the now still figure. But it is unable to, it is trapped, held in by the red aura. Encased by the surrounding ruby glow, the crystallin ball of fire rises only inches from the still form of the man, before, as though resisting with all its strength, it is slowly carried over to hover above the aura encased, helpless form of Gregory.

Within the glowing dome, the ruby aura around the small mouse brightens, lifts and reaches upward to the fiery ball. As it does so, the two auras touch, merge and become one. Within them, the brilliant ball slowly lowers, moving closer and closer to the still form below.

Suddenly, as the blinding globe touches it, the form stiffens, its eyes snapping open to reveal small pools of blue fire, mirroring the great glowing ball above, and in a heartbeat the ball is absorbed into it, as water vanishes into a dry sponge. For long seconds, time seems to stand still. Nothing moves, no sound is heard other than the eerie music of the rats. Abruptly, and without warning, the music ceases, and the enclosing aura vanishes, and with it the body of the human as well. Both fading as though they had never existed. The once still form of Gregory jerks, twitches and attempts to sit up. Again his eyes open for a moment, revealing once more the pools of now fading blue fire. Then, almost as quickly as he had sat up, he lays back down again, still once more but no longer an empty shell.

The glow vanishes, and the rats, as one, release their hands and seem to collapse where they stand, pain and exhaustion etched into their bodies. Archimedes and Justin, leaning against each other, stagger forward a few steps and stop. Looking down at the now sleeping form of Gregory, Justin says to his friend; "It worked, didn't it."

"Yes, I didn't really expect it to, but it did. But now we have a problem."

"A problem?"

"Yes, what have we done? We may have saved a life here, but whose? It's no longer Gregory, no longer a field mouse, but not a man either. What is he? What will happen to him now? I'm afraid we have created more problems with this then either of us ever dreamed could exist."

"Maybe so, but we had to try though didn't we? We couldn't sit and do nothing. Especially since it was our fault this happened to him."

"No, I guess we couldn't."

Justin glances across to where the rats are trying to recover from the transferance. Some are standing, some sitting, and several seem to be unconscious. "They did well," he thinks to himself, "they gave everything they could, and it worked." Then turning back to Archimedes, he notices something. Not something that wasn't there before, but something that was and now isn't.

"Archimedes, what happened to his,...Ah, to the body?"

The older rat turns and looks at where it had rested. A puzzled expression crosses his face as he reaches up to stroke his beard. "I don't know, I didn't expect it to vanish like that. I don't know just what I expected it to do, but vanish certainly wasn't it." He sighs, not liking mysteries. "I guess that's something else for me to have to look into, and I'm already months behind my schedule."

Justin smiles at him, "Admit it old friend, you just love a challenge." The only response Justin receives for this comment is a dirty look from the older rat. Justin smiles for a moment, then his expression turns grim. "Now we have to decide what to do with him. Do we just turn him loose to fend for himself in the forest, keep him in the colony, or what? We can't just let him go off and get killed, he wouldn't know how to survive in the forest, and keeping him in the colony would present problems," Justin looks at Archimedes with a raised eyebrow, "unless....."

"Forget it Justin, there's no way I can take him in. I just don't have the time or the room for him. Besides, it wouldn't be safe for him in the colony, and you know it. He may or may not be from NIMH, and even if he isn't how many of the rats will want to believe it? No, I can't see him in the colony, at least not yet. Maybe later, when this has all calmed down and we can see how things are looking, but not now."

"I'm afraid you're right. What we need is someplace where we can keep an eye on him, help him get used to being what and where he is now, and find out where he's from. And it has to be someplace nearby, but not in the colony." Justin thinks for a moment, then, on hearing the sound of running feet from where he left the boys with Mr Ages, he smiles. "If that's the case, then there's only one answer left. Though I don't think someones going to be too happy with it." With this he turns and faces the approaching mice.

As expected, it is Timothy and Martin, with Mr Ages huffing along behind them.

"Is he okay", cries Martin. "Did you do it?"

"Yes, we did it," answers Justin. "Ages, I'm going to leave him with you, he's going to have to be your responsibility for now. I'd like to take him with us to the colony, but I think the less the rats have to do with him for now the better. There is little affection for humans among most of us, and I don't think he would be well received. Teach him what he must learn, and learn from him if you can, find out if he had anything to do with NIMH."

Ages opens his mouth to protest this imposition. After all, why should he have to put up with this stranger? But he closes it quickly, recognizing Justin's 'I don't want any argument' tone of voice. Even though much younger than he is, Justin is the leader of the rats of NIMH, and unless overuled by the council, his decisions are final.

As Ages tries to digest this unpleasent surprise, Timothy and Martin both speak at once, "We'll help you Mr Ages, please let us help."

Justin quickly accepts for Ages. "That's a good idea. Ages, why don't you put the boys up at your place with... with him," glancing back at Gregory, "maybe they can help you learn something about him. If nothing else, they can keep an eye on him when you're not around, at least until we can come up with someway of getting them home."

Suddenly, Justin is interuppted by the sound of movement behind him, everyone turns and sees the once still form of Gregory stirring.

While everyone watches, the once dieing mouse reaches a shakey hand up to rub his forehead. He then moans and begins to speak.

"Mmmm...Nothing to drink for weeks and I've got a hangover. Ohhh.., what a dream. Miniature fields, tiny plows, scale model of the Hoover Dam, friendly mice all over the place, and rats.....Rats with spears! And that snake, I'll never look another beer in the face as long as I live!"

Lowering his hand from his forehead, he turns his head and opens his eyes, seeing Justin, Archimedes, Ages and the mice. He pulls his head back in surprise, closing his eyes again. "Good God! Now it's giant mice and rats!" He shakes his head, smiling slightly. "I'm dreaming, that's it. I'm still asleep and in a minute I'll roll over and wake up. In fact, I think I'll roll over and wake up right now." He does roll over, and falls from the small makeshift litter, landing on his stomach. The jar of his landing forces his eyes open again, looking straight at the small group. "It didn't work, they're still there. I've got to still be asleep." He levers himself upward and sees his hands for the first time, horror on his face. Slowly he sits up, staring first at his hands, then down to his body. "I've lost my mind, that's it, I'm crazy. Nothing to worry about, in a minute I'll be talking to these giant rats and mice like nothings wrong. Then they'll come and take me away and put me in the rubber rumpus room, no problem. Who knows, it may even be fun." He looks up to the small group, a small, uncertain smile on his face. "Ah, hi there, would anyone here like to tell me what's going on?"

Justin steps forward to speak, but as he begins a rat calls to him from where they are resting. "Leave that human where he belongs, Justin, we need you over here. Bring Archimedes with you, some of us are still out, we can't wake them up." "Justin, come on. Help us, not him!"

Justin turns to Ages. "I was afraid that would happen, take over Ages, he's all yours." With this Justin and Archimedes turn and start to walk to the rats. Then Justin pauses, and turns to the older rat to ask; "Ah...Archimedes, am I wrong or weren't Gregory's eyes brown?"

"What do you mean, weren't they brown? Of course they're brown, I've know him long enough to know that."

"Well, either I've lost my mind or they're blue now."

"Blue? You have gone over the edge Justin, there is no way they could be blue. Here, I'll prove it to you." Archimedes starts to go back to Gregory when another voice calls to him.

"Hey Archimedes! Get over here, will you? Alexander's passed out again."

Stopping in midstep, Archimedes raises both hands in resignation and turns back to Justin. "Ah well, duty calls. I'll talk to you about this later, but I still say you're wrong."

"You may be right, but I'm sure of what I saw. Oh yes, we had better do something about that sack he brought with him. Maybe there's something in it we can use. In any case, we've got to get it out of sight, it and that big stick he was carrying." With this the two walk to where the rest of the rats are gathered.

A shocking revelation

As Justin and Archimedes walk out of ear-shot, Mr Ages turns to the two young mice and Gregory. "Well, come along then. I'll put the three of you up in my place, though just where I don't have the foggiest idea." Glancing up at the now distant shapes of the two rats, the old mouse continues. "Darn Justin, always asking for favors, well this one tops 'em all. Out of the clear blue sky he drops guests on me, as if I didn't have enough to do as it is." While the white mouse had never before hesitated to disagree with or criticize Justin to his face, this somehow hadn't seemed to be the place or time for it. "That's okay," he thought to himself, "I can always give him a good chewing out later." Turning to the still sitting Gregory, Ages continues in his less than happy voice. "Come on boy, Ah...what is your name anyway?"

The mouse looks up at the old white mouse, confusion still prominant on his face. "Uh, I'm Greg, Greg John...."

"Really? Well, that's a coincidence," the old mouse interrupts, "anyway, from now on your name is Gregory, got it?" Without waiting for a reply he mutters to himself, "Easier that way for everybody."

"Gregory? But I....." The mouse tries to get Ages' attention, but with very little success.

"Never mind, come along now, there's a lot of things you need to be told, and I need to find out a few things from you." Seeing that he still hadn't moved, Ages walks up to Gregory and starts pulling him upright. With Ages' help, Gregory uncertainly raises to his feet and tries to walk forward, but takes only a few paces before he stumbles and falls onto Mr Ages, knocking them both to the ground. "Oof!!! Get off me you clumsy idiot! Boys, help him up. Come on, we've got to get moving."

With their help, Gregory is soon brought to his unsteady feet. As they help him up, he begins talking out loud.

"I don't understand, I felt fine yesterday. I got lots of sleep, I have a clean conscience, I'm kind to stray dogs, I help little old ladies across the street....."

Then, with him partially supported between Martin and Ages, the four begin to make their way to Mr Ages' house. While not a great distance, even as measured by field mice, it does take them a while to reach the combination of laboratory and house that Mr Ages called home.

Hidden beneath a huge oak tree, with its entrance nestled between two large roots, Mr Ages' home was a gift from the rats. Soon after their arrival to the valley, Justin and several others got together to dig and hollow out a large area under the old tree. Here they created large, well-ventilated rooms for work, rest and relaxation. Adding electric lights and tools when the dam had been finished, the home became the perfect retreat for Mr Ages' hermit-like life style. From its well hidden entrance, a path was made leading down through the woods and past a small clearing to the field and the colony's main entrance. It is here that the ancient white mouse carries out his studies and research, and from here that he continues to provide medical help to the rats and the original inhabitants of the valley. Though he always complains bitterly whenever someone asks his help, he has yet to turn anyone away without first doing all that he could to help.

Half carrying the still numb Gregory, the small group enters the home and walk down the short hallway to the main room of Ages' house. All along the way, Gregory has tried to keep his eyes open and miss nothing of what he still believes to be a fantastic dream. But it is the insides of Mr Ages' home that surprises him most of all. In mute wonder, he stares at the small electric lights which line the walls. Together with the flames from a kerosine lamp and a bunson burner sitting below large bubbling globes, they cast a strange golden light without shadows. The room is cluttered and disorganized, with small, mouse-sized books and papers scattered everywhere. Looping down from the cieling, and running through-out the room, are wires, cables and slender chains, each running from one mysterious device to another. On each wall are racks and shelves filled with leaves, roots, bark and herbs. All the basic ingredients for the medicines and remedys that the ancient mouse makes for the rats and all the other small creatures of the forest. Everything in sight seems to shimmer and glow in the strange light, giving a sense of illusion to the room. Like the Brisby home, arches and doorways are of wooden tree roots, with here the tree itself forming the home's ceiling. But here there are wooden doors and complexly carved items of furniture. Yet there is a strangeness to the room as well, one that was not so noticable in Mrs Brisby's home. Here, each wall slopes gently to meet the one next to it. Each doorway an irregular oval or circle. Except for the floor, there are none of the smooth, flat surfaces, straight lines, or sudden and sharp angles so favored by human homes. For this is the home of a field mouse, and it was created to please him, not a human being. All of this is seen, if not understood by the strange, dazed mouse. He looks at the lights, the comfortable carpet and small items of furniture, all of which were the last things he had expected to see in the home of a field mouse.

At last he finds his voice, as they reach a small couch and set him down on it. "Now I know I'm still dreaming." Smiling as he shakes his head in disbelief. Timothy and Martin move over to one side of the couch, knowing that Mr Ages will want to talk to him now.

Ages walks up to him and looks him in the eyes, concerned and worried about how to best say what he must. "I only wish that you were dreaming, but I'm afraid that you're not."

Gregory smiles up at him and stands, still unsteady on his new legs. "That's okay, I really appreciate your trying to be so nice to me, but I think this dream has gone far enough. I hope you won't mind if I go ahead and wake up now, will you? I mean this is a fantastic dream. I never thought that my imagination was this good. What with talking mice, electric lights inside a hollow tree, and those rats, oh now they were really something. However, this dream has gotten just a little too real for me, so I'm going to say goodby to you now and wake up. Now then, this has never failed to wake me up before, so it's sure to work this time too." Saying this Gregory closes his eyes and slaps his hands together, hard. He quickly reopens them in surprise, sudden shock and pain on his face. "Ouch!

Hey, that never hurt before, it just woke me up." He looks down at his stinging hands. "They're still there, but they aren't my hands. They can't be my hands!" He looks over to Ages and then to the boys. "Dear God, this is crazy," he whispers. He holds up his hands, looking at them. "My name is Greg Johnson, I'm a human being.....I'm a MAN!"

Mr Ages speaks softly, the gentle words sounding strange from this gruff, irritable old mouse. "Not any more, I'm sorry, but not any more."

"NO!" Gregory screams, "This can't be happening, it can't be....." Trembling, he falls to his knees, his eyes filling with tears and his voice breaking. "It just can't be, it can't." Ages sadly shakes his head slowly, and the two young mice stare at them. They don't know why, but there are tears in their eyes too. At length, Gregory looks up tentatively, still trembling, to face the older mouse. "It's really true, isn't it?" He asks.

Ages nods his head, "yes it's true Gregory. You've got to accept it. We'll try to help you, but you've got to be the one to accept the change, to build your new life. We can't do it for you, so you'll have to do it for yourself, or save us all a lot of trouble and just give up right now. I may as well be honest, with you too. I for one am not at all thrilled to have you here, you should have never come to this valley in the first place. But you are here, and I guess that's what matters right now. So whatever you're going to decide, do it now." By the time he has finished speaking, Mr Ages voice has regained what he considers to be a proper degree of irritation.

Gregory clenches his fists, looking upward to the ceiling for a moment, he nods his head slightly and closes his eyes. Then, reopening them, he looks back to Mr Ages and to the boys. He's made his decision. There are still tears to be seen, but

ILLUSTRATION BY VICI ANDERSON

slowly his eyes are clearing. In a still shakey voice he softly says; "Okay, I guess if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here right now. If that snake wasn't a dream....." He looks hopefully to Mr Ages, but Ages only nods his head, no it wasn't a dream. "Then I suppose I wouldn't be anywhere, or anything, would I. I guess I owe it to you not to just give up. I'll try." He stares at his mouse-paws, then opens and closes them. Raising his hand to his face, he runs it along his muzzle. At first his eyes open wide in brief panic, then he clenches them shut, fighting away the terror and tears. "I'll try."

THE COURAGES OF MAN

Inspired by the theme of "The Secret of NIMH"

The courages of man are known to all,
they've shown him new heights, then seen him fall.
Though vast in number, 'tis simple to see,
when gathered together, there are but three.

Courage of the body is praised and known,
it makes records broken, and new heights flown.
It brings great pride, and often wealth,
but it's greatest flaw, is that it serves the self.

Courage of the mind has brought us far,
the desire to know, to sail by a star.
It creates new dreams, then makes them real,
and is sometimes held as man's ideal.

But this ideal is too often false,
as for every new gain, there seems also a loss.
Yet there is one courage, the greatest of all,
and blessed are those who can hear it's call.

Courage of the heart is fine and rare,
in it the source of compassion and care.
This courage of the heart was a gift from above,
the symbol of God's greatest gift, his gift of love.

Gregg B Anderson

Copyright (c) 1983 by Gregg B. Anderson. Reprinted with permission. Original copyright on many of the characters and scenes in this story is held by the estate of Robert C. O'Brien, and Mrs. Brisby, Ltd. Dedicated to Robert C. O'Brien, whose love and imagination gave us Mrs. Frisby, and to Don Bluth and his talented friends who brought her to life for all of us to share.

The Secret of NIMH
1982

TERESA

Michael
Waltz
'86

JEREMY

Preamble, Introduction, Foreword,
Preface, Author's Note, and
All-Around Blather for
Mrs. Brisby and the Search For Johnathan

I'd like to start by expressing my gratitude to Tim Fay for his hospitality and for providing the opportunity to present my ideas and get this story out of my system! My idea was conceived as a full-blown sequel to the movie, and as you can see from the above title, there's a very specific premise behind it.

The genesis of this project is what I'd like to get into first. I first saw "The Secret of NIMH" upon its release in July 1982, though I didn't become a really devoted fan until it made its pay-TV debut two years later. It really struck a chord with me; I'd been a fan of classical animation for some time, but rarely had I encountered an animated film with such an interesting premise and the potential for further speculation, as well as animation to rival Disney's best and spectacular backgrounds and special effects. And there is certainly much cause for further speculation; unexplained mysteries abound, many of which concern Nicodemus's unexplained mystical powers, and the red amulet. Where did it come from? What was Nicodemus's connection with it? What was Johnathan's connection with it? At the beginning of the film Nicodemus addresses the jewel as if it were Johnathan. Why did Johnathan mean to give it to Mrs. Brisby, and why didn't he just give it to her previously? Why was Nicodemus so fearful of Jenner finding it? What's Mrs. Brisby's first name, for crying out loud? (At this point, incidentally, I hadn't yet read Robert O'Brien's novel, so I had no idea which or how many things would be told in greater detail there. More on that later.)

As I started mulling over these other questions after seeing the film the first few times, I got the idea of developing my own sequel, and expanded "special edition", a la "Close Encounters", of the film. As I pieced things together, it seemed that the premise for my sequel, that of Johnathan being possibly still alive somewhere, seemed quite natural and not in the least corny or contrived. The basic details of that premise came all at once to me one Sunday morning, and throughout that day many other details fell into place. Over the following weeks and months I would add and subtract other details, but the basic plot remained as it came to me that Sunday.

Ideas about further details to add to a "Special Edition" of the film, meanwhile, were being bandied around; events following the escape from NIMH, particularly how the rats came to settle on the Fitzgibbons' farm, how Nicodemus got his powers, how the red amulet came into his and/or Johnathan's possession, how Johnathan and Mrs. Brisby met and their life together before his disappearance, why Johnathan and Mr. Ages chose to live apart from the rats, etc., etc. Some of these details I incorporated into the sequel via flashbacks, but later it occurred to me that there was certainly enough that went on before to warrant a full-fledged prequel. I had just started fleshing that out when I finally found and purchased a copy of "Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH" by Robert C.O'Brien(though this was the retitled Apple/Scholastic paperback). As you could expect, this certainly proved influential, and there was a pleasant surprise or two, in seeing which of my ideas paralleled happenings in the book. For instance, I figured that during the Rats' journey after leaving NIMH, they had spent a lot of time reading and practicing writing, in someplace like a library. In the book, they had settled at the Boniface estate and had done just that. Also, I figured that Johnathan and Mr. Ages had decided to live apart from the Rats because they felt strange associating only with rats, even though they were all friends and had been through a lot together. This is exactly how it had turned out in the book.

The book influenced me in several areas in developing my sequel as well, such as using additional characters from the book that weren't used in the film, and giving Timothy more space and personality than before; I always thought it strange that the whole film centered upon the fact that he was too ill to be moved, yet he appeared relatively little and had only one line. (Incidentally, did anyone else catch "St. Elsewhere" a few months back, where the young actor who did Timothy's voice, Ian Fried, played Nurse Rosenthal's problem child? I guess it wasn't the first time!)

Naturally there were major differences between the book and the film; there were the cosmetic changes(like having the rats and mice walk upright most of the time and wear clothing, the furnishings in the Brisby home,etc.) to make the characters more identifiable. One thing I thought was an improvement was having more conflict of character among the cast, such as making Mr. Ages rather ill-tempered, Martin's dislike of the Shrew, and the Shrew's and children's distrust of Jeremy. Almost everyone in the book gets along almost too well with each other by contrast. Giving Jeremy more personality was good, too, as well as giving Jenner a larger role as the main heavy. I wasn't too surprised to find that all the mystical stuff wasn't in the book, nor that Nicodemus's reminiscences formed a major part of the book; though I think they could've put more of the Rats' origin story in the movie without it being boring. Then, too, the main focus in the book seemed to be on the Rats and the threat of their being discovered, whereas in the movie, the focus was more on Mrs.Brisby and her troubles,and her situation was certainly more dire that that of Mrs. Frisby.

One difference that really bothered me, though, was in the depiction of NIMH and its scientists. In the book, by Nicodemus's own admission, the Rats were not actually mistreated, though they certainly felt confined and wanted to escape; and the scientists were given names and weren't faceless ogres who maimed and tortured, as they were made out to be in the film. I'm not going to go off on an animal-rights spiel, pro or con, but I don't think the film's producers should have gone out on a limb like that.

Now, about the prequel I mentioned earlier: I'm not going to write that because I feel all the ideas I had for it were largely covered in the flashback section of the book. Most of what was included there certainly can apply to the characters in the film (except, most notably, the departure of Jenner and his followers). Those I'll be alluding to, via flashback, in my sequel, which, I should again emphasize, is based on characters and situations from the film (though the book had provided certain influences). I should also note that I'd been visualizing this all along as an actual film, but since there's no great chance of that happening, I'll just say to heck with eliminating details which might make things slow or dull(at least to some, mainly younger, audience members) if it were a film. Writing it in prose form should also prove challenging.

Incidentally, I keep using the future tense here because, before my rough draft, I hadn't yet committed anything(except what I'm writing now) to paper. I'd just been making mental notes previously!

So enough of this fol de rol. I'm certainly looking forward to seeing everyone's contributions after completion, not to mention my own. I remember the near-endless stream of publications appearing between "Star Wars" installments, many given entirely over to speculation over what would happen in the next sequel. "The Secret of NIMH" certainly gives just as much cause for speculation; maybe not to as large a crowd, but one just as devoted. Say, I wonder who else came up with a "Johnathan Lives!" premise? That I'll especially want to see.

Mrs. Brisby and the Search for Johnathan

by David A. Leemhuis

Based on characters and situations from the film "The Secret of NIMH" (a Don Bluth Production) and the novel "Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH" by Robert C. O'Brien

Prologue I

A light snow was falling on the Fitzgibbons farm, adding to the several inches already fallen in recent days. And in the garden, underneath the large slab of granite that jutted from the middle of the garden like a petrified tidal wave, Mrs. Brisby's family was growing restless on this late February day. Inside the enclosed cement block which was their winter home, Mrs. Brisby, a widowed field mouse with four children, was sitting by the window watching the falling snow while her children occupied themselves with various games. Martin, the oldest, and his brother Timothy were playing a variation on baseball with a stick and wadded scrap of paper. Teresa and her younger sister Cynthia were on the floor with a checkered cloth spread out before them, playing a version of checkers using different colored pebbles.

Mrs. Brisby's thoughts began to wander, as they often did in recent months, as she gazed at the snowflakes drifting down. She thought about all that had happened the previous spring, with Timothy falling ill with pneumonia dangerously close to Moving Day; her meeting with the crow Jeremy, who had taken her to see the Great Owl; her meeting with Nicodemus and the Rats of NIMH, who agreed to move her house to bring it out of the path of the tractor and avoid endangering Timothy's life by exposure to the chill air; and the treachery of Jenner, who caused the death of Nicodemus and the near-deaths of all her children, who were saved by the power of the red amulet Nicodemus had given her. The amulet. She hadn't really understood what Nicodemus had meant when he referred to the power it contained; and after it had displayed its power by liberating her house from the sucking mud (as well as expelling all the mud that had started to fill the inside),it was too late for him to explain further. She'd been fascinated by it when Nicodemus first gave it to her, but after it displayed its power, she wasn't sure about keeping it, so she gave it to Justin, who was now the leader of the Rats, who were forced to evacuate their old home very swiftly and move to Thorn Valley....

Her reverie was abruptly interrupted. Teresa was berating Cynthia for accidentally scattering their checkers game, and Cynthia was yelling and starting to cry back at her.

"Now, children," Mrs. Brisby told them, "I know we've all got cabin fever, but all this yelling and arguing isn't helping any. Teresa, help Cynthia straighten up your board."

"It's all right, Mama.[1] I'll help her," offered Timothy. He got on all fours and started gathering stones with Cynthia.

Mrs. Brisby smiled to herself, but it was tinged with sadness. Timothy was always so helpful, and so perceptive about so many things-- so much like his father it was almost uncanny. Her thoughts began to stray back to when she and Johnathan first met. She had recently lost her own parents to either Dragon, the Fitzgibbons' cat, or some other predator-- she was never really sure-- but now it was Dragon who had her cornered in a hollow log. She was

1. Each of the Brisby children refer to their mother differently: with Teresa it's "Mother"; Martin, "Mom"; Cynthia, "Mommy"; and Timothy(from his one line) "Mama".

safe for the moment, but the log was rotten enough, and she was so petrified with fright, that she knew it was only a matter of minutes, if not seconds, before she joined her parents....and then suddenly Dragon was distracted by something; he backed off suddenly, and she could hear sounds of a scuffle, but she knew that she didn't dare budge from the spot--she couldn't have anyway if she tried. After a few minutes there was silence--then another mouse appeared at the opening. He introduced himself as Johnathan, and said that he saw Dragon corner her there, and almost entirely on impulse, he took it upon himself to act as a decoy. He managed to evade Dragon for several minutes--just barely once in that time--but he knew that, luckily, it was almost Dragon's mealtime, and that they would be calling him to the house soon. She was still not over her fright as she listened to his story, so he stayed with her for a time, comforting and reassuring her that it was safe to come out, and soon, they did. She soon realized the full impact of what Johnathan had just done. For as long as she remembered, nearly all the animals of the field had been terrorized by Dragon, and now here was a mere mouse challenging him.[2] He had always been very brave, almost foolhardy; how ironically fitting that it was Dragon that brought them together, and then four years later it was Dragon that.....

Again her reminiscences were interrupted, but this time by a gentle tug at her cape. She looked down, and saw Timothy staring up at her inquisitively. She realized that she had begun weeping, and now tried to hide it. Timothy asked her, "Mama, you've been thinking about Daddy again, haven't you?"

Tears began to well up again, but she also felt great affection. "Dear Timothy...I never could hide anything from you. Yes, I was thinking back to the day we first met."

"When he saved you from Dragon?"

"Yes. There are so many happy times I remember, but...I guess I can't help feeling sad too."

"I miss Daddy too. We all do. But we've done all right for ourselves since then, haven't we?"

Mrs. Brisby realized that once again, here was Timothy reassuring her, as he'd done many times before. "I guess we have. And I have all of you, and we all have each other." Martin, Teresa, and Cynthia had by now gathered around.

"It's all right, Mother," Teresa said.

"Yeah, Dragon comes around here, he'll have to deal with me," said Martin.

"Yes, we've done all right, Mommy," said Cynthia.

And now Mrs. Brisby was embracing them all as one. Despite previous trials, she hoped to expect nothing but a normal life for herself and her family from now on. She again thought about the events of last spring, and hoped never to face anything as dire again.

If only she knew then.....

Prologue II

Elsewhere.....A figure sat by a window, gazing at the sunset, his thoughts far away. How like the sunsets he'd known in past years, he thought, before everything changed for him. Similar, and yet...

His reverie was interrupted by a light tapping on the door, which was open. "You've been here most of the afternoon, my friend," the figure at the door, who was much different in appearance, said to him. "I've prepared a light

2. In the film, there was no mention of how Johnathan and Mrs. Brisby first met, and the book told little more; so I thought a fairly dramatic account of their first meeting would be appropriate. Note also the spelling of Johnathan's name, from Nicodemus's journal at the start of the film, and again later.

repast for us both, and I hope you'll join me."

"Thanks, Gwinthrayle," said his friend, "but no thanks. I'm not hungry." There was an air of weary resignation about him, like a grudging acceptance of a fate which was futile in fighting.

Gwinthrayle, ever responsive to changes in his friend's mood, replied, "This is most unlike you, my friend. Please, come downstairs, and after we've dined, we--"

"I said I'm not hungry!" his friend replied sharply. "And I don't need another--" he began, then fell silent, disbelieving his own uncharacteristic outburst. "Gwinthrayle, I'm sorry. I can't believe I raised my voice to you."

"It's all right, I understand. But you should never abandon hope."

"But I should apologize. I know I haven't been the best company lately. You've shown me more kindness and hospitality than I've ever had the right to expect. You took me in when I had no place to go and was more than a little scared and uncertain. I've almost come to regard this...place as much a home as the one I left. But all that I did leave...Madeline...my children...many good friends. They must have all given me up for dead long ago."

"I know it's hard. I've been experimenting with some different spells the past two days, though, and I believe we may be close to a breakthrough. If only I had something as powerful as the jewel which..."

"That blasted jewel! If it weren't for it, I'd never have--" He checked himself again. "I'm sorry, there I go again. I...guess I will have dinner after all."

"Very good. And then afterwards we can try out these spells I've been researching. I believe you'll have good cause to be hopeful." And his friend knew that Gwinthrayle meant it sincerely. But wasn't there the possibility, after all, that this was just another attempt doomed to failure, or at least with no visible result? Gwinthrayle's friend put the thought out of his mind. "It's not like me to think in absolutes, to expect the very worst," he thought.

He didn't realize that events to ensure success had already been set in motion, and that the results would be quite unexpected.

1. Spring again

It was mid-March on the Fitzgibbons farm, and the weather had warmed considerably in the past two weeks. And in the Brisby home, and throughout the field, the prospect of Moving Day was imminent again. They knew it could arrive any day, but there was no real cause for worry. Last year, of course, there was Timothy's pneumonia, which led Mrs. Brisby to such strange and new experiences, but now everyone was healthy and feeling well, and Timothy himself was looking and feeling more robust lately. He still wasn't as large as Martin, or even Cynthia, due to his more frequent illnesses in his early years. But there was little doubt in his mother's mind that those days were largely over. This year Moving Day would again be the leisurely affair it had been in past years.

Martin emerged from the rooftop entrance of the house,looked all around for a minute, and returned to the entrance. "C'mon up, it's plenty warm out here," he quietly called down the stairs.

Seconds later Teresa emerged. "Martin, I don't think we should be out here. Mother said to wait a while."

"Aw, I don't think she'll mind. We won't go far, and we can rush right back in in case of Dragon." He climbed down from the roof to the ground.

"But, Martin..." Teresa began exasperatedly. She sometimes wondered why she ever bothered to keep him out of trouble, but started following him. Peering over the edge, she couldn't immediately see him. She climbed down and looked around. "Martin, where'd you go?" she cried.

"I'm over here," replied Martin from behind a tussock of grass. "Hey, and guess what? There's even a little snow left on the ground."

"So?"

"So this!" A wet, white missile whizzed through the air, just barely missing Teresa.

"Martin, you'll be sorry if you do that again!" Another half-melted chunk soon followed. "All right, you asked for it!" She rushed into the tussock of grass, but Martin wasn't there. He'd rushed over to another nearby patch of snow. Teresa started flinging bits of the first patch at him, and he responded in kind. It quickly escalated into a laughing, shrieking, free-for-all. Cynthia and Timothy were by now observing the mayhem from the roof.

Finally Martin held a particularly large chunk over his head, hollered, "Here's the granddaddy of them all!" and flung it with all his might, though he wasn't deliberately aiming it at Teresa, just seeing how far he could fling it. In any case, it came nowhere near her, but instead made a graceful arc downward toward a nearby bramble patch, from where a familiar voice was subsequently heard: "Brisby! Bris--boogpht!"

"Uh-oh," said Teresa quietly, and she and Martin, as well as Cynthia and Timothy (who had climbed down shortly before) headed for the bramble patch. Sure enough, there was Auntie Shrew, wet,cold, and fuming.

"Oh, Auntie Shrew," said Teresa somewhat meekly.

"Oh, Auntie," said Cynthia.

Martin was too busy rolling on the ground laughing to even say, "Oh, no!"

Timothy just greeted her with a polite "Hello, Auntie Shrew," but she barely heard it over her own voice.

"You disrespectful, spoiled little monsters! Just wait till your mother hears about this! Why, she won't let you leave the house till next spring! She'll--"

"She'll ask you to calm down!" came a new voice from the roof. Mrs. Brisby climbed down and added, "Now come on inside, please, and we can talk."

"I will not! Are you encouraging that kind of irresponsible behavior?" she demanded, wiping her face with her wrap.

"No, of course not. But they've been cooped up inside for so long, they just needed to let off steam. Surely you understand."

"Bah! I'll not have any of it! These young hooligans need to be taught--"

"Now just a moment, Auntie Shrew! You know I'm always grateful for your help, and I never refuse it when you offer it. But these are my children, and it's up to me to decide how to raise them!" Mrs.Brisby said gently but firmly. She had, in past times, described herself as timid, but she always had had great inner strength--more than she admitted to herself--and her experiences around Moving Day last spring certainly proved it. She had changed since then; she could be more direct now, less reluctant to speak her mind.

The Shrew was clearly taken aback, but remained adamant. "Well!--I would--advise you to think about that anyway. Now--I suppose you're aware that Moving Day is almost upon us again."

"Yes, we know. We're making preparations right now. We're already half packed."

"Well, see that you get out in time. Good day!" she said indignantly, and turned, grumbling as she walked away.

Mrs. Brisby turned toward her eldest son and shook her head, but with a slight smile. "Martin what am I going to do with you?" She could hardly blame his or Teresa's exuberance, but was clearly weary of his occasional tiffs with the Shrew.

"Aw, Mom,why does she need to come around so often? Heck, we already knew about Moving Day anyway."

"I know, but you heard what I said to her, and she does mean well. Now, come on , all of you, and help me finish packing, and then we'll conceal the window and our entranceway--just the way the Rats showed us."

"Hey, Mom, speaking of the Rats, remember last year when you promised we could come visit them someday?" Martin piped up.

Mrs. Brisby again smiled to herself. "Yes, I do, but don't you think we should wait a while longer?"

"Oh, Mother, please, couldn't we?" Teresa chimed in.

Cynthia and Timothy added their voices in favor too. After a minute Mrs. Brisby said, "All right, everyone, quiet down. That's better. Now, I have an idea. We'll pack as usual, conceal the house, and move to the summer home, and then we'll set out to see them."

The children went wild with joy. As their cries died down, their mother thought to herself, "Well, they're very happy about it and can't wait to go. But should I tell them the main reason I want to visit the Rats? I'm certainly just as curious as they to see how everything's coming along with them, but....no, I suppose it's best if I say nothing about that. It may be nothing, after all. But I must find out what I can." She'd only feigned her reluctance to give in to them immediately, then. But now she wondered if that was really necessary. After all, there was no reason for them to suspect that she wanted to visit the Rats for other than purely the same reasons as they.

She herded them inside and they continued packing.

2. The Journey Begins

The next day, after taking the necessary steps to conceal the entranceway and window from the eyes of the Fitzgibbons family when they would begin planting and harvesting, the Brisbys set out for their summer home. They hadn't the need to bring much along; mostly bedding, many small items, but they had many of the same furnishings there, and there were other things they didn't need there.

It was a quite lazy, leisurely trip, as it had been in past years, taking most of the daylight hours to reach it. Their summer home was located beneath the roots of a giant oak tree by a brook, near several other mouse families. As they approached, one of their neighbors came to greet them.

"Mrs. Brisby! It's good to see you and your children again. Everyone's fine, I see; and Timothy! He's looking much better."

"He is, Janice. We all are." They continued to chat for awhile while her children joined the other children. Soon she said, "We'll be leaving again, tomorrow."

"So soon? Whatever for?"

"To...visit some friends who live far away. We'll be back in about a week or so." Earlier, she had told her children to say the same to anyone if the need arose. She'd realized the importance long ago of revealing as little as possible of the existence of the Rats of NIMH. Earlier, she had considered telling the Shrew of their plans, but decided against it. Even after all the Rats had done for Mrs. Brisby, the Shrew still held them in the lowest esteem. She remembered the night they came to move the house, and how the Shrew refused to remove herself and the children (including Timothy, who had to stay inside anyway) from the house. The Rats had no choice but to move it anyway... "If only I'd been there myself," Mrs.Brisby thought, "so much trouble could have been avoided. But I got captured after putting the sleeping powder in Dragon's bowl, and..."

"It's a shame you have to leave so soon." Janice said, interrupting Mrs. Brisby's train of thought. "I hope you have a good time."

"Yes, I'm sure we will. We're all curious to see how things are going for them."

The next morning, after settling in at the summer home and a good night's sleep, the Brisbys set upon their journey. For this trip, there was no need

to take along very much, and they knew food would be plentiful along the way. Last year, as the Rats departed for Thorn Valley, Justin gave them a copy of a map showing the way there, and said that their welcome mat would always be out for them. They had this map with them now, of course (though Martin had bragged the day before, "We won't need that! I've memorized it, and I could lead us there with my eyes closed!"). They earlier had estimated that it would take at least three days total to reach Thorn Valley, taking frequent stops to rest and eat. The children and Mrs. Brisby alike knew it would be no short stroll, but the children's enthusiasm was by no means dimmed; it was the greatest adventure for them. Mrs. Brisby, too, was by now much less reluctant to let her own enthusiasm show. She still thought it best, though, not to tell them what was, for her, the most important reason for going. Best to save it for Justin, she thought.

By dusk the first day they had reached a thick, dark woods, largely oak and maple. On the map, there was indicated a particularly large, sprawling oak at its center. Other significant details about this woods were also indicated.

"Children, remember when I told you about Jeremy's and my visit to the Great Owl?" Mrs. Brisby asked. "Well, this is his woods."

"Wow! Do you suppose we'll see him?" Martin asked.

"I hope not," said Cynthia tremblingly. "After all, owls eat mice, don't they, Mommy?"

"I'm sure we won't have a thing to worry about," Mrs.Brisby reassured her. She herself wasn't particularly afraid, though seeing him that first time still stuck in her mind as being very unsettling and intimidating, though simultaneously there was something tragic about him, as if knowing that his own time was short.

They'd gone a little further into the woods before they began searching for a place to camp for the night. Mrs. Brisby realized that what they had most to fear were other predators, like weasels and badgers, so she knew that their best bet was to find a hollow log, or any kind of shelter with an entrance just big enough for them but too small for intruders.

"This one looks good, Mother," offered Teresa, indicating one hollow log.

"Hmmm...that might be suitable, but the hole seems a bit..." She stopped suddenly as she felt the fur on the back of her neck rise.

"What's wrong, Mom?" asked Martin.

"Shh! Get in, quickly!" They obediently scampered for the log and piled inside. Mrs. Brisby turned her head, and almost simultaneously, the weasel was bearing down on her. She scrambled for the hole, and just barely made it inside in time. It was barely a large enough hollow for all of them.

"Mother, wh-what'll we do?" Teresa stammered, petrified.

"Just don't move," she replied, "and maybe he'll get discouraged." She tried to sound as reassuring as possible, but the hole was larger than what was suitable for them, as she'd thought, and she knew that once the weasel had his head completely through the hole, the rest of him would follow. And he was determined, pressing his snout through the hole, trying to work his whole head through. Soon he'd be close to succeeding. The children averted their eyes. Mrs. Brisby held her breath and hoped the end would come swiftly and painlessly...

...And then, the weasel wasn't there. Mrs. Brisby, still frozen to the spot, listened closely, barely breathing, but could only hear the normal forest sounds. In another few minutes, she began edging slowly towards the hole, the sensation of movement returning to her limbs seeming strange, and the children also began to stir. "Stay here," she whispered to them, and cautiously peered outside. No weasel directly outside, and the scent was beginning to dissipate. A thought briefly entered her head, about a similar experience long ago, and about he who brought it about. She had a brief impulse to say

his name aloud, but then realized how foolish it would be; and yet, considering the reason for this trip....

She ventured out still further, and looked the whole area over. Still no weasel. Finally, on impulse, she looked up to the branches of the surrounding trees; and at the base of one heavy limb there was a great hulking figure, bent over something she couldn't quite make out. It was a figure that made her gasp in recognition. The figure turned and looked directly towards her. It spread its enormous wings and swooped down to the ground, landing no more than a foot from Mrs. Brisby, eyes glowing with feral light. "So...it's you," she murmured tremulously, almost inaudibly.

"Mrs. Brisby," came the booming voice of the Great Owl. "So we meet again."

"I--I don't know how to thank you."

"I witnessed your plight from yonder limb, and thought it looked like you and your family. I am pleased to see I was right. Please, call out your children, and let me meet them."

"Children! It's safe to come out. It was the Great Owl, he saved us."

Martin peered out first, eyes widening as he saw this enormous, powerful figure looming over his mother, who seemed unafraid of him. He emerged cautiously, followed by Teresa, who gaped in astonishment. Cynthia was harder to convince and, even when Timothy tried to coax her out, she would emerge no further than just inside the hole. After their mother introduced them to the Owl, he asked her, "Now, why are you here, so far from home, and where are you bound?"

Knowing that he had known the Rats, she saw no harm in telling him that they were bound for Thorn Valley to visit them. After she did this, she asked him if he knew anything about their own trek there and their current progress.

"Yes, they were entirely successful in their move, and are making great progress on their own now. I hadn't told you when last we met, but I first met Nicodemus when he first went scouting for a new site for his colony, and I suggested Thorn Valley to him. I was quite fascinated by them, you see, and by the prospect of their building their own civilization. I oversaw much of their move there, and have made occasional fly-bys since. Because of your own close ties to them, I now offer my protection to you."

"Lucky for us," Martin said under his breath. He remembered saying occasionally that he wasn't afraid of the Great Owl, and though he was still given to bluster on occasion, he was as awestruck and wary as his siblings.

"Shh," Mrs.Brisby lightly admonished him. "Can you show us a place for us to sleep tonight?" she asked the Owl.

"Yes, I will lead you to it, and watch over you from now until you leave my woods." He again spread his wings, flapped them furiously and created so much turbulence that the children had to lean on their mother and each other to keep from being bowled over. He made off towards another nearby hollow log, much more spacious on the inside, and beckoned to it. Mrs. Brisby urged her brood towards it, and the Owl returned to his limb to finish off his kill.

As they bedded down for the night, Mrs. Brisby thought to herself how fortunate things had gone thus far, and hoped for similar success upon reaching the Rats.

3. Jeremy and Beatrice

The following morning the Brisbys continued on, following the remainder of the route that took them through the Owl's woods; and the Owl, as he promised, escorted them to the outer fringes. He again landed before them and said, "I wish you and yours luck, Mrs. Brisby. As for myself, I must now leave you, for these woods and I have been part of each other for many years, and

my remaining time grows short."

They all looked at each other in disbelief. Martin, much bolder now, asked him, "You--you mean you think you'll die soon?"

"The oak tree where I make my home, Martin, is very old, and has been dead for several years. Any time now it could topple completely in a strong enough wind. It, in particular, and I, are so much a part of each other; and I myself feel the weight of years heavily upon me. When it finally topples, I shall certainly go with it."

Mrs. Brisby hardly knew what to say. Finally, she said, "I feel so badly for you. You've done so much for us, I wish I could properly repay you."

"My calling in life has ever been to help and advise others, Mrs. Brisby, and my reasons have ever been my own. Now I must return home to rest, but you will have further aid for the remainder of your journey. Farewell." And again, he rose into the air, the Brisbys bracing themselves as he did. They watched him gliding over the treetops till he disappeared from view; then, silently, they turned and resumed their journey.

Mrs. Brisby reflected on his words, particularly on the sad irony of how his present predicament so closely resembled hers and her family's, last year. The children all realized the same thing. Timothy, after a short while, asked, "Mama, what did he mean by 'further aid?'"

Mrs. Brisby, in her reflections, had nearly forgotten his very last words to them. "Why, I have no idea. I guess we'll just have to wait and find out." Looking ahead, the mountain beyond which lay Thorn Valley loomed before them. It seemed so close, but she knew it would be at least one more day's journey. She couldn't help feeling a sense of urgency, but also realized that there was no sense in rushing things; they could certainly afford to take their time. But then, there was still the everpresent danger of predators, day and night. She had known this from the outset, and had impressed upon the children (and had to keep to reminding herself) to not become preoccupied with other matters.

Not even an hour after leaving the Owl's woods, Martin said suddenly, "Mom, I think I see a hawk!" He pointed upward, and Mrs. Brisby saw it too. She unhesitantly directed everyone to a nearby outcropping of rock, with many large boulders, and they all nestled into a hollow amongst them. They waited there, knowing they would all be safe from a direct strike, but hoping all the same that they hadn't been spotted. The hawk swooped a bit lower, but as it did, two other birds appeared. One of them connected in midair with the hawk.

"Mom, are they attacking the hawk?" asked Martin.

"I'm not sure. It looked more like they...collided with each other." It occurred to her that the newcomers were crows, and instantly she realized which crows. She smiled to herself, and could just imagine hearing, "Excuse me, pardon me," after the one's collision with the hawk, who apparantly was sufficiently discouraged and left the scene. The two crows continued downwards, and their rather jerky flight patterns were now quite unmistakable. "Children, it's safe to come out," Mrs. Brisby announced, and as they did, the crows swooped down, apparantly directly towards them. By now, the children realized who the crows were, too, and weren't afraid at seeing these two great birds approaching.

"Look out below!" one of them cawed, and both of them, in rapid succession, swooped into a nearby thicket with the grace of a pair of albatrosses. The Brisbys approached the thicket as the two birds extricated themselves.

"The turkeys!" Cynthia giggled.

"Why, Mrs. Briz! And your family! I'll bet you're surprised to see us, eh?" came the familiar greeting.

"The Great Owl sent them?" Martin asked disbelievingly.

"Shh. It's good to see you again, Jeremy and Beatrice[3]." said his mother. "We didn't know quite what to expect when the Great Owl said he'd send help, but we certainly didn't expect..."

"Aw, no need to thank us, Mrs. Briz. The word got around to us that you were out here all alone, and we got to worrying what might happen...." Jeremy paused, trying to disentangle some creepers from around his neck and feet and wings.

"Yes, we were glad to help," Beatrice added.

The children helped Jeremy free himself, while Mrs. Brisby started conversing with Beatrice aabout what they'd been doing since they last met the previous year, just after Jeremy and Beatrice had first met (though she and the children had occasionally met with them in the area since then).

Martin was on Jeremy's back, and as he bit through a vine, an idea came to him. "Say, Jeremy, you know that we're on our way to Thorn Valley, don't you?"

"Yeah?"

"So...you could fly us there!" The other children reacted enthusiastically, and Teresa went to ask their mother.

Her first impulse was to voice a flat "no," recalling her old fear of heights; but he had flown her to and from the Great Owl the previous year, and had given her and the children a ride once after Timothy recovered from his pneumonia[4], so she wasn't nearly as reluctant of flying as before; plus, it would probably be less risky than continuing walking through all this unfamiliar territory, and would get them there that much faster...suddenly, she felt almost as enthusiastic as the children. "Is it all right with both of you?" she asked the crows.

"Why, sure!" they both replied cheerfully. "It's nothing at all."

"Then we'd better get prepared." She and the children selected some sturdy vines to tie around the crows' necks, not too tightly, to give themselves more to hang onto. Soon, everyone was ready. Mrs. Brisby and Cynthia rode on Jeremy's back, and Timothy clung to his leg; and Martin and Teresa rode on Beatrice's back. The crows took off, carrying their passengers aloft, high above the rock-strewn meadows which soon gave way to forested foothills, towards the cleft which formed the easiest access to Thorn Valley.

The children shrieked with delight at seeing the world rush by so far beneath them. Twice Martin shouted in mock terror, "Oh no! We're gonna crash! Agghh!" which annoyed Teresa to no end.

Mrs.Brisby asked Cynthia how she was holding up, and she replied that she was a little scared, but enjoying the ride; then she asked Timothy the same, and he answered that he was fine, cupped in Jeremy's claw. Mrs. Brisby thought about how strange it was to have had such a run of good luck; she almost felt guilty about not being able to do much in return. She recalled, too, how ungrateful she must have seemed to Jeremy during the previous spring's crisis, sending him off to unnecessary tasks twice.

"Hey, Mrs. Briz," Jeremy asked at length, "when you get to the Rats, are you going to get that sparkly back from them?"

For an instant, Mrs. Brisby was baffled, but then remembered what he was referring to. The red amulet, which Jeremy had taken such a shine to when she had possession of it. "Maybe, Jeremy, maybe," she replied, thinking it best to not say anymore in front of the children, who might ask questions she herself couldn't answer right now. When Timothy heard this exchange, though, he grew thoughtful and quiet.

---

3. Why Beatrice? I couldn't just go on calling her "Miss Right", now could I? Seriously, though, it seemed somehow appropriate.

4. I'm sure we're all familiar with that piece of promotional artwork depicting just that scene, which appeared in various places like magazine reviews, but which didn't appear in the film. I thought it wouldn't hurt to work it in.

Soon, they were soaring high above the cleft between the mountains, which hid this valley from the sight of so many, untouched as yet even by humankind, and specially chosen by Nicodemus for its remoteness.

Then, all at once, Thorn Valley lay before them.

4. The Rats of Thorn Valley

Mrs. Brisby and the children alike grew breathless at the vista spread before them. She recalled a brief description of Thorn Valley from Justin; he had said it was an impressive enough sight from the ground. "He should see it from up here," she thought.

The valley was about a mile long, ringed on all sides by sheer cliffs. The floor was mostly forested, broken here and there by an occasional clearing, and several ponds fed by natural springs. Mrs. Brisby remembered that Justin also said that their new colony had been started by digging into a mountainside, under some rock ledges. But this was quite a large valley, and there was a lot of mountainside.

"Jeremy, have you or Beatrice noticed any great amount of activity around here anywhere?" she asked.

"Oh, you mean the Rats? Oh, sure, mostly at the far end of the valley." They headed in that direction. Soon they could see a good-sized clearing up ahead. A small, still pond lay nearby. "We've seen a lot of moving around in this area," Jeremy observed.

"Well, then, I guess you can take us down anytime." She was not particularly worried, but was concerned about landing; it had been duly noted for some time that Jeremy and Beatrice were certainly two of a kind; they both had little problem in taking off, but landing was often a rather shaky proposition. "Make sure you land where it's good and clear," she reminded him.

"Not to worry, Mrs. Briz! Now hold onto your hats, everyone, we're coming in!" As one, the two crows began their descent. Mrs. Brisby hung on tightly, partially tucking Cynthia under her arm. Jeremy closed his claw a bit more around Timothy, who held on more tightly himself. On Beatrice's back, Teresa and Martin were braced. "Yeeeehaaaaa!!" Martin hollered as the ground came up to greet them.

At least it started as ground. They were landing where it was clear, all right; clear over the pond!

"Jeremy, what are you doing?" Mrs. Brisby demanded. They were only about a foot above its surface when they swung back up and over dry land, and then descended light as a cloud towards the ground.

"Well, here we are, safe and sound," Jeremy announced. Safe, at least, thought Mrs. Brisby.

"Wow, that was great! Let's do it again," Martin exclaimed as he and Teresa lowered themselves from Beatrice's back.

"Martin, please," Mrs. Brisby said in only half-hearted annoyance. She couldn't really be angry with the crows, since they had flown them here, and brought them down safely. The children were all laughing excitedly after the ride, and their mother found their laughter infectious. She thought now was a good time to say some things to Jeremy that she'd meant to for some time.

"Thanks again for your help," she said to both of the crows, and then to Jeremy: "I'd also like to apologize for trying to get rid of you last spring, after we'd gone to the Owl. I was just worried, you see, about my family, and especially Timothy, and I had to make sure things didn't go wrong. I know it made me look ungrateful, but..."

"Aw, don't pay it any mind, Mrs. Biz," he cut in with his usual jocularity. "I had a lot on my mind, too."

"Where are you going now?" Teresa asked.

"We'll stick around the area for awhile and look in on you from time to time, in case you want a ride back when you're ready to leave." The children's enthusiasm was again heightened. Mrs. Brisby knew by now that there was no point in arguing, even if she wanted to. Then the crows bid the Brisbys farewell, and then flew off toward the other end of the valley, and Mrs. Brisby and the children turned their attention towards their immediate surroundings. The crows had landed them close to part of the mountainside, and outcroppings of rock and many overhanging ledges were everywhere. This might be the right area, all right, but where to begin?

Seeing little alternative, they began following alongside the sheer rock cliffs that ringed the valley. Mrs. Brisby was concerned at first that they might be wandering aimlessly, but sooner than she expected, their search came to an end.

As it happened, they were found first. Mrs. Brisby heard herself being paged, and when they all turned towards the voice's source, saw a rat running towards them. "Children, we're here! We've arrived," she said.

The rat stopped and breathlessly greeted them. "Hello, Mrs. Brisby. We've been expecting you and your family for months. Come follow me, I'll lead you to our new colony. Oh, and my name's Melvin." Beckoning them to follow, Melvin led them to one particular overhanging ledge, where she saw three other rats, one much larger than his fellows, before a tunnel entrance. "Brutus! Just as you thought, we have visitors, but hardly strangers," Melvin announced to them.

"Mrs. Brisby! So it <u>is</u> you!" Brutus turned to the other two rats. "Kevin, Lol, go tell Justin to roll out the red carpet." They darted into the tunnel. "Mrs. Brisby, you and your family are our most honored guests. Please follow me." He led them down the unlit tunnel.

Mrs. Brisby briefly recalled her and Brutus's first meeting, and how it almost looked as if he even meant to kill her; she involuntarily shuddered, though she knew his actions were only reflective of the Rats' wariness and fear of being discovered (though Justin told her later that he had given Brutus a good talking to afterward); plus, he did help in moving her home later.

Cynthia asked, "Mommy, where's the red carpet?"

"I think they mean they're going to give us a big welcome."

"Indeed we are," answered Brutus. "You'll always hold a high place of honor with us, Mrs. Brisby, for warning us of the arrival of the men from NIMH and saving all our lives."

She'd always known this, of course, though she'd remained modest about it; her children had known it too, but to them it had certainly placed her in even higher esteem.

They had only descended the tunnel a short ways when it started growing lighter.

"Lights! Do you have electricity?" asked Mrs. Brisby.

Brutus nodded. "And only recently, too. I'm sure Justin will want to personally give you all the details about everything we've done."

The tunnel presently widened out to a high-ceilinged, well-lit room, off which other rooms and corridors branched. Many rats had already gathered there; word of the Brisbys' arrival had spread quickly. As they entered, they were immediately surrounded by a throng of well-wishers. Shouts of welcome abounded as they were lifted to the shoulders of several rats, and carried down an adjoining corridor. The children were bemused by all this attention, but Mrs. Brisby held up with stoic endurance. She could hardly blame their adulation, but felt rather embarrassed all the same, even as she had felt proud of herself for being able to help.

Soon, a familiar figure made his way into the crowd, which parted to let him through: their good friend Justin, once the Captain of the Guard, now the leader of the Rats of NIMH. The other Rats lowered the Brisbys to the

floor. Justin greeted them with his own typical lack of decorum, giving Mrs. Brisby and each of the children a big hug. After reintroductions, he said, "Well, you must all be tired after such a long journey. Come this way, we've prepared a space for you to rest and refresh yourselves." For all his informal and relaxed manner, Mrs. Brisby sensed that he was carrying a great burden on his shoulders; the responsibility of being the Rats' new leader, she thought. Or was there something else too? She briefly considered asking him about...no, but that would be best left for later, in private. He led them to an apartment, simply but comfortably furnished. "Our guest quarters. We prepared this specially for you for when you'd come to visit. It's yours for as long as you like."

Mrs. Brisby again felt like saying that they needn't have gone to so much trouble, but instead thanked him, and she and the children settled down to dine on the meal that had been prepared for them. They told him, though, that they were all too excited to be there, and that they probably wouldn't want to rest afterwards. Justin suggested that he take them on a tour of the colony after their meal, and they all agreed enthusiastically.

Justin showed them how this colony was partially dug into the mountainside, and patially set up within naturally occurring cavern spaces. They had reestablished, or were still setting up, many of the facilities they had at the old rosebush colony: workshops, a library, a schoolroom, storerooms for grain, fruits and vegetables. By tapping the natural springs in the area, they had fresh running water. They had dug many tunnels to the outside; service tunnels, Justin called them, used mainly for transporting food and a variety of other materials.

The children were awestruck (though hardly speechless) by all this, and their mother was very impressed at how they had set things up after only a year. "A year of sweat and toil and everyone giving one hundred percent," Justin told her. "Naturally we had our share of complainers, but the urgency of our situation was well known to everyone by that time, and there were no major problems. It's going even better than Nicodemus expected. And now, I'd like to show you the achievement I'm the most proud of."

This, of course, was their electrical power plant. "We're not running on full power yet; that's why we're still in the process of setting a lot of other things up. All the same, we're working with a lot of voltage here, and it's potentially very dangerous, which is why we have several Rats specially qualified to operate and maintain it." He took them around the outer perimeter of the room, and briefly explained how the plant functioned.

When this was done,and they were leaving, Justin said, "Did I mention how our agriculture program was coming along? Last year was much better than we expected, and we even had a surplus of some crops. So we expect a pretty high yield this year.

"There are those among us, though, who are still pretty wary of being discovered, who think we should take more care in above-ground activity, especially agriculture. Old habits die hard, I guess,but you can't really blame them; even here, where no humans have ever ventured to the best of our knowledge, there is always the chance that humans could find their way in. But this valley is part of one of their national preserves, which decreases our chances of being discovered considerably. We still maintain a Guard, though, of which Brutus is now the Captain."

After this explanation, Justin took them back to their quarters, but when they got there, Mrs. Brisby told him out of earshot of the children, "Justin, there's something I'd like to talk with you about alone. Your own quarters?"

Justin was a bit surprised, and thought for a moment. "Well...yes, of course. But we can't just shut your children away. Let's see...." Several Rats were passing by, all greeting the Brisbys and Justin politely as they did, and Justin called one of them over to him. "Isabella! Would you do something for me?"

Mrs. Brisby remembered Isabella briefly from the old colony, where they met in the library.

"Why, of course, Justin, anything," she replied pleasantly. Mrs. Brisby remembered how Isabella seemed attracted to Justin, but got quite shy and flustered in his presence. She seemed less so now, but still enjoyed being the object of his attention.

"We've begun a children's recreation center, with many toys, games and other activities," Justin said to Mrs. Brisby, then said to Isabella, "Would you take them there for us?"

The children were quite interested in meeting some of the Rat children, and so soon Isabella led them there.

"This way to my own office and apartment," Justin said, and led Mrs. Brisby to an upper level. Soon they reached a door, ordinary looking but for a plaque, engraved with Justin's name, bolted to it. Justin opened it, and they entered the room, Justin closing the door behind them.

"It's very nice, Justin," she said as Justin led her to the smallest, just her size, of several comfortable chairs.

"Thank you," he said as he sat across from her. "Now,what was it you wanted to discuss?"

"It's the main reason I wanted to come here; it may be nothing, but I felt I had to see you, to see if you could tell me anything. I never mentioned it to the children, because I didn't want to possibly alarm them, but...some strange things have been happening to me."

"What sort of things?"

She took a deep breath. "I guess I should start from the beginning."

5. The Search Begins

There was a knock at the door.

Justin sighed. "Somebody's timing certainly stinks," he said with a grin. He got up and opened the door.

"Justin. Mr. Ages has arrived, and is on his way up right now," the rat at the door announced.

"Thanks, Darwin."

"Mr. Ages! Were you expecting him?" Mrs. Brisby asked Justin as Darwin left.

"Eventually, yes; he said he'd look in from time to time, but on the same day as you? Quite a coincidence." He was going to add something just as Mr. Ages walked in.

"Well, Justin! I never thought I'd say it, but it's good seeing you again."

"It's good seeing your ugly face again, too, you old curmudgeon," Justin said as he gave him a handshake and a pat on the back.

"Hmmph," snorted Mr. Ages indignantly, but he was smiling. "Who's your previous guest?" he asked, but then looked more closely. "Mrs...Brisby? Why, what a coincidence!"

"We were just saying the same thing about you. It's good to see you again, Mr. Ages." They embraced each other. Mrs. Brisby thought about how much more receptive and sociable Mr. Ages had been since last spring; those events had forged unbreakable bonds among them all.

They exchanged more words on their journeys to get there; it seems Mr. Ages had made a similar bargain with a mother bird, also a crow. the previous summer. He had fed and sheltered one of her babies which had fallen out of the nest, and she was so grateful that when Mr. Ages recently saw her again and said he was journeying to Thorn Valley soon, she unhesitantly agreed to give him a lift.

Now Justin was telling Mr. Ages that Mrs. Brisby had a problem of an ur-

gent nature that she'd been preparing to discuss just as he arrived. Mr. Ages conceded, adding, "What I came to you about can certainly wait; it's probably nothing."

Mrs. Brisby's eyes widened at these words, so much like her own minutes earlier. Had he experienced similar things? She put it out of her mind, and proceeded with her story.

"It started...well, I can't say exactly when, but it was several months ago. There have been many times when I'd think about Johnathan; just remembering our life together, nothing unusual. But then...it's hard to describe, like something in the back of my mind suddenly....bursting forth when I wasn't even thinking about Johnathan, and suddenly it was like..like Johnathan's voice calling me. Not like either of you talking to me now, but...almost like I could feel...his mind. And....sometimes I'd get an....impression, I guess I'd have to call it, of someone else with him.

"This happened several times, but after a while it didn't bother me too much; I thought it was just because I missed Johnathan, and I didn't want to alarm the children, so I never told them about this. But then, just a few weeks ago, things took a different turn. I was asleep, dreaming about something very ordinary, hardly unusual, when all at once....he was there, calling my name, imploring me, as if he were standing right in front of me. I couldn't see him, but...I felt him." Her two friends could see that she was groping for words, trying to describe the indescribable. "The...impression was even stronger this time, and it shook me awake almost instantly. But even then...though it started to fade, I could still feel him. I had similar experiences three more times over the next two weeks, each while I was asleep, but the night before we left our home was the strongest yet. It was so intense I...I woke up shouting his name out loud. I was in a cold sweat, shaking like a leaf. The children all wondered what was wrong, of course, and I just told them it was a bad dream; which was true, but....Justin, Mr. Ages...it was more than that. I believe that strongly."

Both her friends had listened closely, silently absorbing her every word, but now Ages said, "It looks, then, like we're here for similar reasons, after all." He said this in a near-casual manner, but to Mrs. Brisby it had the effect of a thunderbolt.

"You mean...you've had the same experiences?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes, though not nearly as intense as the recent ones you've described. Mine have all along been more like your early...episodes. I had some hunches about their cause, which I, like you, thought coming here would shed light upon."

Justin added, "Well, I don't know about that, but whatever's happening isn't limited to yourselves."

"Justin, not you too?" Mr. Ages and Mrs. Brisby asked, almost in unison.

"Yes, though mine have been similar to yours, Mr. Ages. There's not much more to tell about them that you haven't already described."

"But what could all this possibly mean?" Mrs. Brisby asked.

"I've no idea, but this much we do know: we each thought these were unique experiences, but all of us have had them, and Mrs. Brisby's were the most intense. So...do either of you have any ideas?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Brisby replied, "but somehow I feel that the jewel, the red amulet, is somehow the key; I'm not sure how, but I feel the answer lies there...somehow."

Ages and Justin were mystified by her convictions, but Justin said, "At this point, I'm willing to believe just about anything. There's still so much about the jewel itself we don't know. That was the reason you left it with me, after it had manifested its power; you thought I was better equipped to get to the bottom of its secrets, but so many other things have occupied my time. I've hardly had the chance; I'm not even sure I could learn anything

more about it."

The three of them reviewed what they did know about the jewel. Not long after the Rats established their first colony, Johnathan had brought home this jewel, already set in a pendant. He said he found it in a hollow among some rocks, looking good as new, as if someone had just placed it there for him to find. Nicodemus was clearly fascinated by it, but let Johnathan keep it. Then, one day, the jewel manifested its power for the first time. Johnathan and several of the Rats, including Nicodemus, Justin and Jenner, were in the old abandoned mill near their colony, figuring how best to utilize it for their purposes, when one of the Rats found himself falling to a certain death. Johnathan was almost directly beneath him, and the radiant red light from the jewel, which Johnathan was wearing, seemed to slow the rat's descent in midair, setting him gently down. For a short while afterward, it left Johnathan feeling exhausted. After this incident, Johnathan gave it to Nicodemus, who wanted to study it; he'd already begun dabbling in magic and mysticism ("There was still a lot about Nicodemus we never quite learned," remarked Justin at this point) and certainly seemed qualified for the task. All this happened before Johnathan had met Mrs. Brisby. Sometime later, after Jenner first had his falling out with Nicodemus over the matters of stealing from the farmer and relocating to Thorn Valley, Jenner would sometimes talk of coveting the jewel for himself...

At the mention of Jenner's treacherous leanings, Justin expressed great frustration, cursing and slapping his fist into his other hand.

"Justin, what's wrong?" asked Mrs. Brisby.

"I'm sorry. I...thought I'd pretty much put it behind me, but...I still get so frustrated about not being able to foresee the kind of treachery Jenner was capable of, and because of it..."

"Oh, Justin, you shouldn't be so hard on yourself," Mrs. Brisby said sympathetically.

"She's right, lad. You can't hold yourself to blame for Nicodemus's death," Ages added.

"Strange coming from you, Mr. Ages, considering you had him pegged right all along. 'Nothing will come of it, it'll pass,' I said; 'suspicious old goat,' I called you. But you were <u>right</u>! Why couldn't I see it?"

Mrs. Brisby said, "Justin, no one could've foreseen what Jenner had done."

"She's right, Justin," Mr. Ages added. "Even I never imagined him going as far as he did."

Justin took a deep breath and thought for a moment. "You're right, of course. I know it's too late for self-recrimination. After all, Nicodemus himself wasn't as careful as he should have been; he and Jenner were old friends, going back a long ways together, so he practically left himself wide open." He winced at the memory of seeing Nicodemus struck down and buried beneath the moving equipment, and then being forced to do battle with Jenner after he'd threatened Mrs. Brisby's life over the jewel. "I'm sorry, I guess we'd best return to our immediate problem."

Mrs. Brisby said somewhat hesitantly, "This is probably not the best time to bring this up, Justin, but...what more can you tell me about the night Johnathan....I mean, I know Nicodemus told me it was while he was putting the sleeping powder in Dragon's bowl..."

"Are you sure you want to hear this?" Justin asked concernedly.

"Please, don't spare my feelings. I have to know."

"All right. It was on one of our nights in which our plans brought us out into the open, like so many of them. On this one, Johnathan was preparing to drug Dragon, as he had many times before. I, and two other rats, Arthur and Willis, consulted with Johnathan before he went off. He had the jewel with him again; he didn't say why, and we didn't press him; we figured he and Nicodemus had some arrangement between them on it.

"None of us could see exactly what happened to him, since he was there in the farmhouse kitchen alone; we had no reason to expect anything to go wrong, after all. But later, when he didn't show up at the prearranged location at the prescribed time, we got worried; so Arthur, Willis and I made our way into the house through an unlocked window, and looked the place around.

"Dragon was sound asleep on the kitchen floor, and wasn't the least bit aroused by our presence, so we knew Johnathan had succeeded there. Then, investigating further, we found, in the broom closet....the jewel, just lying there, with Johnathan nowhere in sight. Upon closer examination, we...found drops of blood on the closet floor, and the jewel itself had blood on it. Of Johnathan himself we never found a trace."

Mrs. Brisby looked sad, but also thoughtful.

"I'm really sorry," Justin said, placing a hand on her shoulder. "I wish I didn't have to tell you, but...at the same time I wish there was more I could tell you."

"It's all right, Justin. Where is the jewel?"

"Right over here," he replied, walking over to his desk and bringing a small, ornate hinged box out. Mrs. Brisby recognized it as the same one that Nicodemus used to store the jewel when he first presented it to her. Justin took out the amulet and handed it to her.

Mrs. Brisby looked it over, as entranced by its beauty as when she first saw it. Standing at her shoulder, Mr. Ages said, "You know, looking at that now makes me think, somehow, that you're right. Maybe it does...know something."

She got up, clutching the amulet to her chest. "I guess you could call it another 'unexplainable' feeling, but...just seeing the jewel again gives me such a feeling of hope, like I...we will find out why all this has been happening." She looked at it again and sighed. "Why have you been calling us, Johnathan?" she asked, only half-seriously. Suddenly her eyes got wide, and her face looked as if she were going into shock. Before Justin and Ages could ask her what the matter was, the amulet dropped out of her hands, and she made a frightened sound.

At her side the next instant, Justin led her back to the chair while Ages picked up the amulet. Justin pointed to an adjoining room and told Ages to get some water. Mrs. Brisby was almost catatonic; Justin told her to take deep breaths and try to relax and get hold of herself. She seemed somewhat more composed as Ages arrived with the water. She took a couple of sips from the cup, and Justin asked her, "Now, can you tell us what happened? Did you... see something in the jewel?"

She nodded, taking another sip. Soon she felt more able to get the words out. "I...I saw a room; a strange room, like none I'd ever seen. There was a...figure sitting by a window. It turned towards me, facing me, and...and..."

"Yes, go on," Justin said softly.

"Justin...Mr. Ages...it...the figure..was Johnathan!"

They looked at each other gaping, speechless. "Johnathan! Are you sure?" Ages asked. Justin, though, had no doubt, at this point, that she'd indeed seen what she described.

She nodded. Her expression of shock was gradually being replaced by one of conviction and determination. "This can only mean...Johnathan is alive. Somewhere, somehow, he survived. And...that jewel is what sent him there!"

Justin and Ages looked at Mrs. Brisby and at each other for a minute, silently weighing her convictions. Then Justin said, "You know, I think I believe you. From all we've seen, it makes sense." The three fell to further debate, weighing conjectures and possibilities, and then Justin said, "I'm going to call a council meeting immediately."

Messengers were sent out, and soon the council was gathered in the council chamber. This was a wide and tall room, much like the one in the old colony, though not as elaborately decorated. These meetings were usually open to anyone with an important matter to discuss, though this was limited to councilmembers only. The room was now abuzz with discussion. Why was this meeting called so abruptly? It must be some sort of emergency, to warrant such a swift gathering.

Justin soon appeared before them, and quelled some of the rumors going around, such as humans invading Thorn Valley. With Mrs. Brisby and Mr. Ages at his side, he told everyone that they would be leaving on a mission as soon as possible. He explained, as briefly as possible, about the jewel, the "impressions," what Mrs. Brisby saw, and how they believed it all tied together. He then asked for two volunteers to accompany them, and almost immediately, two came forward, who turned out to be Arthur and Willis, the other two who were with Johnathan just before his disappearance. He then appointed a councilmember named Orson as interim administrator until their return. After asking for the other councilmembers' confidentiality on what had been discussed, the meeting was adjourned; Ages, Arthur and Willis went to Justin's chambers, Justin filled in Orson on various administrative details, and Mrs. Brisby headed for the children's recreation area to break the news to the children. How much to tell them, in fact, what to tell them, she wondered, all the way down there.

"But why can't you tell us more?" Teresa was now asking her.

Mrs. Brisby thought hard. She knew this wouldn't be easy. "Remember last year, when Timothy was ill, and I first went to the Rats for help?" The children all nodded. "I couldn't tell you then, either, but just like then, I'm doing this for the good of all of us. Now, you'll be well looked after while I'm gone, and I will be back. I can't say for exactly how long I'll be gone, but I will be back." They all looked sad(though Timothy also looked thoughtful, as if he suspected more than he let on), and their mother reassured them once more that she loved them and would return.

After she left them, she felt like weeping, though she outwardly remained stoic. She and the others had discussed the possible risks, and there was a chance that...no, she thought, I can't let myself think that way. This had to succeed.

She went up to Justin's quarters, where everyone--Justin, Ages, Arthur and Willis--were waiting. "How'd it go with the children?" Justin asked her.

"As well as could be expected." she replied.She almost sounded as though she weren't as sure of this mission as before.

"Well, then, let's go over this one more time." He and the others all looked to her.

"Well, first of all," she said,sounding as confident as possible, "I believe that the jewel acts on the wishes of the wearer, but not with just anyone. Maybe there was something special about Johnathan, I don't know; but it has worked with me before..."

"But how do we know," Willis interjected, "...I'm sorry, didn't mean to interrupt, but if it did transport Johnathan away, then it stranded him wherever it took him. Couldn't it do the same with us?"

"We already discussed that, Willis," said Arthur. "I mean, I've been skeptical about things like that; I once thought, for instance, that all we'd seen Nicodemus do when he claimed to work magic was just sleight-of-hand, all done with mirrors. But then, we all saw the jewel raise the Brisby home from the mud. If Mrs. Brisby thinks we can succeed in this, it's good enough for me."

"I wish I could be that sure," Mrs. Brisby said, to everyone's surprise.

"I know we'd discussed earlier that if I concentrated, wished hard enough, that the jewel would take us--and itself--to where it took Johnathan, but..." She turned to Justin. "Oh, Justin, it's been like a rollercoaster with me since I saw the image in the jewel. What with having to tell the children that I was leaving and not knowing when I--we'd return....I just wish I could know for sure." By now, she was holding the amulet again; she turned it over, and her eyes fell upon the near-forgotten inscription engraved upon it. Then, to all who watched her, it seemed an instantaneous change had come over her. Her shoulders no longer stooped, her old look of determination returning to her eyes.

"Justin...everyone...let's go find Johnathan." There was no reservation, no trace of doubt left in her, as the words of the inscription rang in her head: "You can open any door if you only have the key."

Minutes later, everyone was in place. The jewel was around Mrs. Brisby's neck; Justin, Arthur and Willis had, with her, all joined hands in a circle. They all carried satchels and backpacks containing various provisions and supplies, though none knew exactly what was waiting for them, so it was difficult to know exactly what and how much to bring. Mr. Ages, whom they had mutually agreed would stay behind and maintain a vigil for their return, stood off to one side with Orson, who had since joined them.

"Mr. Ages, I feel rather badly about your staying behind. Are you sure about this?" Mrs. Brisby asked.

"Quite sure, and thank you, but I am older than the rest of you, and might slow you down," he replied.

"Orson, hold down the fort," said Justin.

"I'll keep things running smoothly, Justin, don't worry. Just be careful, all of you."

"We will. Now, concentrate, everyone, the way we discussed earlier."

Everyone closed their eyes. They all thought hard, wishing for the jewel to lead them to Johnathan, and for the jewel to accompany them there. There was to be no trace of doubt in anyone's mind of their success. Arthur and Willis were now totally committed, all traces of skepticism gone. They had volunteered, after all, as much out of a need to know what happened to Johnathan that night as the others. Johnathan had been a devoted, selfless friend to all the Rats, and they would have done most anything for him as well; now as well as then.

About two minutes after they had begun, Orson whispered to Ages, "How long is this supposed to take?"

"We're not sure; maybe this sort of thing takes longer, and...wait, I think it's...starting."

The jewel around Mrs. Brisby's neck was started to glow red, gradually increasing in intensity, the glow radiating outward until it seemed to envelop the four friends. Orson and Ages averted their eyes...

Abruptly there was a flash of even brighter light, followed by darkness. Orson and Ages looked up. They were alone in the room.

And as for the four friends, they too were now in darkness, and suddenly found themselves feeling weak, and all collapsing to the floor.

6. A New World

They were all conscious, but felt dazed and weak.

"Whew...anyone get the number of that...oh, skip it," said Willis into the dark. He had a propensity toward jokes in hard or unusual circumstances.

"Whouf...does everyone feel as lousy as me?" asked Justin.

"I don't feel all that great, but I think I'll live," said Arthur. "Mrs. Brisby?"

She was flat on her back, but spoke clearly enough. "Something strange has happened to us...but what?"

"We're not in my office, for sure," said Justin. "This...feels and sounds like a cave, but where?"

"I was about to ask if anyone else couldn't see besides me," said Willis. "I guess we haven't all gone blind then....have we?"

Everyone was gradually feeling better, and began to stand up and get their bearings as best they could.

"Wait a minute!" Justin said urgently. "What about the jewel? Did it come with us?"

As if in answer, a faint red glow began illuminating the chamber, enabling them all to see each other, however faintly.

"All right!" exclaimed Willis.

Everyone was highly relieved, but Justin reminded them, "We're not out of the woods...or in this case, cave, yet. We have no idea which way is out, or where to begin looking for Johnathan."

"But we are guaranteed our ticket home now. For right now, at least we can see each other. That should help some," said Arthur.

"Say, I wonder why the jewel didn't just transport us to where Johnathan is now?" Willis asked.

"Perhaps it could only drop us off in one location," Justin offered. "It sure knows how to pick 'em." Then, suddenly aware that Mrs. Brisby had been mostly silent the past few minutes, asked her if she sensed anything different. Thus far, they had all come to trust in her judgments; it was clear by now that the jewel and she were associated with each other in an as-yet unfathomable fashion, probably as much as it apparantly was with Johnathan.

"This way," she answered, facing an adjacent tunnel. "This way will lead us out."

"How do you know?" asked Willis.

"I'm...not sure; I just sensed it, like the jewel was telling it to me. Not like I hear your voices now, but..." Her voice trailed off.

"That's enough for me, troops. Let's get going," Justin suggested, to everyone's approval. After making sure they hadn't left anything behind, they started off.

As they made their way through the tunnel, Mrs. Brisby remarked on the weakness she and the others felt upon their arrival, comparing it to that which she felt after the jewel first manifested its power through her(as previously with Johnathan, as well), liberating her home from the mud. They speculated that maybe she (and they) recovered more quickly this time because she was more in tune, for want of a better term, with the jewel. They remembered, too, how it had initially burned her hands that previous time, and it hadn't now.

They continued making their way through the caverns, Mrs. Brisby still leading the way. "How long have we been at this?" Arthur asked at length.

"About twenty minutes, give or take," said Willis. "Something better happen pretty soon."

"I think something might, Willis," replied Mrs. Brisby. "There's light ahead."

Sure enough, there was a faint glow of daylight, around a bend. They all made for it swiftly, anxious to see where the jewel had brought them. They rounded the bend, and had to squint for an instant as the direct daylight greeted their eyes. They came up to the cave mouth...

And were greeted by a sight that defied all their attempts at description. They could only stare with wonder as they viewed these new surroundings all around.

Mrs. Brisby was the first to voice the question forming on all their lips. "Where has the jewel brought us? What is this place?"

"I don't know," said Willis. "Sure wish I hadn't left my map back home."

They were standing on a ledge outside the cave mouth, leading down to the forest below, which stretched to the horizon, broken here and there by clearings. A lake lay far off in one direction. Scattered here and there were strange rock formations. Strangest of all to the companions was the forest vegetation: plants unlike any known to them were growing everywhere. Looking up to the otherwise familiar looking sky provided a real jolt: two suns, shining brightly. The weather was quite hot, about 90° Fahrenheit.

"It's so strange, and yet beautiful at the same time," said Mrs. Brisby.

"It's certainly like nothing I've never seen on Earth," agreed Arthur.

"You know, that reminds me of something Nicodemus once hinted at; other worlds, other places of existence; I think this is what he was referring to," mused Justin.

Mrs. Brisby was clearly mystified by the concept. "I don't understand... other worlds?" Arthur and Willis were similarly baffled.

"I'm not sure I get it either; but apparantly, just as the place we left, that we've known all our lives, is one world, this is a different world," Justin speculated.

"Well, whatever it is, we've got our work cut out for us here," said Willis. "Mrs. Brisby, is the jewel still talking to you?"

"It doesn't really talk, Willis, it...oh, never mind, I know what you mean. Wait...yes, I know where we should go now." She led the way again, down the trail leading to the forest level. They all clambered down the trail after her, all feeling some apprehension at passing through these strange surroundings, but this was overshadowed by curiosity, a sense of adventure, and, in Mrs. Brisby's case particularly, the need to confirm whether Johnathan was indeed alive.

They followed an apparantly well-beaten pathway through the forest, and were constantly on their guard, for this was a totally alien environment to them, and none knew what hidden dangers may be lurking. Many of the plants looked fairly ordinary; plain-looking grasses lined the trail, there were leaf-bearing trees, shrubs and vines. Many, though, were quite bizarre: there was one, basically tree-like, but with tubercle-like growths radiating from its trunk in succession, like a spiral staircase; another, also treelike, with a trunk that appeared to inhale and exhale like they did; a flowering plant with a thick, squat trunk that ended with an enormous, spreading two-petaled blossom, colored a dazzling orange and yellow; and many others. Mrs. Brisby continued to lead the way, but sometimes their passage was blocked by vines which required cutting; for this purpose, the three rats had brought machetes, on Arthur's suggestion. They couldn't foresee every contingency, but luckily this one proved beneficial. At one point they encountered a tangled series of green tendrils, crossing their path entirely of its own volition. As they approached it, Willis started to move to cut it away, but Justin advised him to stay his hand. The mass stopped and waved some of its tendrils in front of them, as if regarding them silently, then continued on its way, after which they resumed walking. There was animal life, too, and thus far none seemed hostile or much bigger than themselves, luckily. Indeed, life in general here seemed scaled down, comparable to what rats would encounter if they were human-sized on Earth. They occasionally had to fight off groups of flying insects, or insectlike creatures. Larger flying creatures quite unlike birds could occasionally be seen overhead. Earlier Justin had cautioned the others not to show hostility unless directly attacked; after all, <u>they</u> were the outsiders here, and their mission wasn't to do battle with the locals. At one point a legless, snakelike beast crossed their path; turned its head toward them, showing a face almost like a fox; regarded them silently for a moment, then slithered off to the other side and continued studying them, its eyes expressive and intelligent.

"I think the fascination is mutual," said Arthur.

"This whole place is fascinating," added Justin. "If not for the heat, I could almost get to like it here." He swatted at a biting insect on his arm. "Almost."

Mrs. Brisby had been silent for most of the trek, her thoughts hardly straying from the purpose of this mission, though simultaneously just as aware of their surroundings as the others, and just as fascinated by the pageantry of strange new life passing them by. "It is beautiful here," she said, "and I'm sure Johnathan's found it just as fascinating." She started wondering, then, about how things may have gone for him since he came here; how he was holding up, being separated from all he'd known and loved for so long. Then, too, she and everyone else had thought him dead, and was now faced with the prospect of his being alive "again". How would it be for either of them when reunited? Would things be the same as before? And the children--how would they react?

She vowed to avoid such negative thoughts. Now, she was receiving more "instructions" from the jewel, as the four friends approached a choice of paths, branching off. They took one of them.

Elsewhere, a figure stood in front of a mirror-like pane of glass, and viewed the arrival of these four strangers. Upon closer examination, he noticed something which sparked a particularly keen interest. "Sithpha!" he called out.

Another figure, much different in appearance, entered somewhat fearfully from an adjacent room. "Yes, Ghormfisk?"

"That's sir to you!" Ghormfisk snapped sharply. "Come over here, I have a task for you."

Hesitantly, Sithpha came up beside Ghormfisk and peered at the view in the glass. After Ghormfisk explained Sithpha's task, Sithpha asked, "But then what will you do to them?"

Ghormfisk cuffed him, sending him sprawling. "You will do as I tell you, with no questions! Or have you so soon forgotten what will happen otherwise?"

Sithpha shuddered as he got to his feet. He knew very well what Ghormfisk was capable of, and that Ghormfisk never missed a chance to hold it over his head. So he left the house to carry out his assignment, but inwardly was determined that, one way or another, this would end, and soon.

And, further still away, to the northwest, two friends sat across from each other on the floor, in a trancelike state, with eyes closed, surrounded by inscriptions and arcane paraphernalia. Soon, they both opened their eyes. One said to the other, "What happened, Gwinthrayle? It was almost as if we couldn't make contact."

"Yes, I'm afraid you're right. This spell, like all we've utilized, is specifically geared toward your home dimension. But we couldn't reach your wife or friends; some of them, anyway."

"But why?" Gwinthrayle's friend wondered.

"It was almost as if they weren't....there anymore." Gwinthrayle's catlike eyes narrowed as he considered the implications. His friend rubbed at his whiskers, as was his wont when trying to make sense of complex questions.

7. Sithpha and Ghormfisk

As far as their provisions were going, the four companions had enough food and water for about three days; they knew that it would be risky to sample any of the local fare without knowing whether or not any of it would be harmful or even fatal to their own systems, so they strictly rationed their

own provisions.

It was now approaching nightfall. The first sun had set an hour ago, and the other was very low. They knew they'd have to make camp soon, and were discussing who would stand the first watch when they heard a rustling in the branches directly above. Before they could prepare themselves, something they couldn't see clearly in the receding daylight jumped down with a screeching cry that sounded like "yeeahooie!" (though later they would remark that it looked more like he lost his footing and fell) and landed directly on top of Arthur! They both rolled around together twice before stopping, and both Arthur and Willis subsequently wrestled the newcomer to the ground while Justin and Mrs. Brisby looked on.

"Do you think he means us any harm?" asked Mrs. Brisby.

"Only one way to find out. Okay, guys, let's have a better look at him." Arthur and Willis drew back but still kept a firm grip on him, pinning his arms and shoulders down. The newcomer was about the rats' size though was more humanoid in form. He had light blue skin, was of a rather thin build, and his face was also basically humanoid, though with wide eyes that were rather catlike, and other facial features that gave him an almost reptilian appearance. The fact that he wore clothing-- a vest and short pants, apparantly of woven plant fibers, and shoes of some undetermined material-- indicated that his was a civilized race. He spoke quickly in a language unintelligible to the four friends, and sounded almost indignant about being restrained like this.

"I'd almost forgotten there'd be a language barrier," said Justin.

"I think it's safe to let him up, don't you?" Arthur asked. The newcomer seemed more curious than afraid of them, and they couldn't see any reason to fear him. Justin told Arthur and Willis to release him. They did, and backed away somewhat warily, but the newcomer just got to his feet, calmly dusted himself off and said a few more gibberish-sounding words to them.

"If only we could understand each other," said Mrs. Brisby. "Think of what he could tell us of this place." And then, once again as if on cue, the jewel began glowing again, at first rather brightly, then dimming. They all noticed this, of course, and before the others could say anything, the newcomer said, "Well! What was that all about?"

"Well, that was just a..." Justin began, then stopped, realizing what had just taken place.

"We understand you! Do you understand us?" Mrs. Brisby asked.

"Yeah, I sure do," the stranger replied. "Why'd that stone glow like that?"

Thinking fast, Mrs. Brisby told him, "It's...making us understand each other." She knew that this surely was the truth, but thought it best not to show surprise about it, and she threw a glance at the rats to let them know this.

"Do you have a name?" Justin asked.

"Sithpha. I don't live very far from here, see, and I saw you coming and I was curious. You look awfully strange. Where are you all from?"

"Oh, a long, long ways from here," Justin replied. "We're looking for someone, this lady's husband. His name's Johnathan Brisby. Have you seen him or known about him?"

"Hmm. I don't believe so, but if you need a place to crash for the night, just follow me."

They all looked at each other. He seemed sincere enough, but Justin, especially, still had suspicions. He'd learned from bitter experience that behind even the most genial-seeming manner lay the potential for treachery. The four friends conferred in private, and soon mutually agreed that it should be safe enough, but that they wouldn't let their guards down. And soon, led by Sithpha, they resumed their journey.

"So, the jewel's a translator, too, eh?" Willis remarked along the way to Arthur. "Next, I suppose it'll conjure rabbits out of midair." They all won-

dered what further surprises the jewel held in store for them.

They would soon find out, to their regret.

Along the way, they asked Sithpha some questions about this part of the world (rather than the world in general; they still didn't want to let him know, at least not right away, that they were not of this world), like where most of the people of the area lived, if there were any large population centers nearby, etc. Sithpha replied that there were larger cities and towns further away, and that these parts were the frontier, the "sticks". He, in fact, described himself as "just an ol' country boy." Willis remarked that whoever was behind the jewel's power must have a strange sense of humor, what with some of the translations they were receiving. Justin guessed that, technologically, this world was roughly on a par with 18th Century Earth, from Sithpha's further descriptions.

They soon were led to a small house at the edge of a clearing. It was circular, built of stone, and seemed rather old. Sithpha said, "I live with a....friend here. I'm sure he'll welcome all of you." The four friends all noticed the hint of hesitancy in his voice, and exchanged wary glances. Before Sithpha reached the door, it opened to reveal his "friend". The four friends were a bit surprised to see that he was of a totally different species than Sithpha. He stood a head taller than the rats, and was basically humanoid in form but had four arms and was of a very stocky build. His skin was covered in a short, velvety green fur and a ruffle of darker green fur framed his face, which was even closer than Sithpha's to a human face except for two tusks projecting upward from his lower jaw. He was dressed in a red and white close-fitting coverall-type garment.

"Well, Sithpha," he said in an apparantly hospitable manner, "I see you've brought guests. Welcome. I am Ghormfisk." The four friends could hear from this that the jewel was still translating. "You obviously are strangers to these parts, and have journeyed a long way. Please come in and make yourselves at home." Despite his somewhat fearsome appearance, they couldn't see any harm in accepting his hospitality (though, of course, they remained on their guard). So, following Sithpha, they entered the dwelling.

Inside, there were three adjoining chambers branching from the main room, in which there were many odd furnishings; a pane of apparantly ordinary glass, a bench with a variety of charts and calculations scattered across it, others they couldn't readily identify. After introducing themselves, they sat down on some chairs and benches; again, their host seemed very gracious and even apologized for not offering them more comfortable seats. He asked them questions about who they were and where they came from, but they were careful not to tell him any more than what they told Sithpha. As they talked, he continually glanced toward Mrs. Brisby, or, it seemed, toward the red amulet.

Finally, outright, he asked them, "I've never seen a jewel quite like yours, Mrs. Brisby. May I look at it?"

Naturally, she was hesitant; but Ghormfisk assured her that he only wanted a closer look at it. She glanced toward Justin, and he gestured for her to go ahead. She took it from around her neck and handed it to Ghormfisk.

"Aaah, yes," he said as he examined it. He then closed his eyes for a few seconds as if concentrating on something; then he started mumbling something they couldn't understand.

"I don't like this," said Arthur to the others as Ghormfisk's chanting grew louder. "How come we can't understand him now?"

Justin had already noticed this and was getting up, hand already at his machete. He moved towards Ghormfisk...

...And never reached him. There was a sudden blinding flash from the jewel, and in the next instant, an invisible barrier went up between Justin and Ghormfisk. Still reeling from the flash, Justin bounced off the barrier, but before hitting the floor, the barrier pushed against him and the other three,

who had also gotten up and were ready for almost anything. Anything but this. The barrier forced the four friends through Ghormfisk's door, after which they were deposited onto the front lawn. It had all happened so fast that they barely had time to react, but now they were on their feet and started towards the door, but they were again stymied by the invisible barrier. Ghormfisk appeared at the door.

"You treacherous slime!" shouted Justin angrily. "And we trusted you!"

"Why? Why are you doing this?" asked Mrs. Brisby.

More to himself than to his "guests", Ghormfisk said, "Too long have I waited. Now nobody will stand in my way!" Another flash of light emanated from the jewel. Before any of them could react, the ground shifted around them, and a circular wall of rock, several inches thick, grew out of the ground around them and swiftly rose to a height of almost ten feet.

All the while, Sithpha, almost unnoticed, had gone into one of the other rooms, but now, he had observed the whole scene and was aghast. All these past months he had been bound to serve Ghormfisk, but witnessing this scene, this imprisoning of four innocents who had trusted both of them, was too much. Brandishing a thick stick, he rushed out the door, and, raising the club over his head, prepared to bring it down on his "master"'s head, but was stopped in his tracks as the others were.

"You'd dare assault me now, knowing what I could do?" Ghormfisk demanded.

"They did you no harm! It was bad enough that you forced me to deceive them, but now you imprison them!"

"Very well, since you're so concerned, you can join them!" Ghormfisk said contemptuously, and, wielding the jewel's power, hurled Sithpha upwards to the tubular prison's top opening.

8. Shanghaied

The ground vibrations had died down enough to enable the four friends to get their feet and fully absorb the seriousness of their predicament.

"He shanghaied us!" said Arthur disbelievingly. "Just like...like..."

"...like rats in a trap," finished Willis.

"Shut up, Willis," said Justin angrily. "It's happened again! Again! When we get out of here, nothing will keep me from him!"

"Justin, please calm down," Mrs. Brisby said.

"I'll calm down," he replied sternly, "when I see that Ghormfisk lying dead!"

Mrs. Brisby and the others felt their hearts turn to ice at his virulent words. They realized it was memories of Jenner and his treachery that had brought him to this vengeful state of mind, but before they could think or say anymore about it, a cry came from above their heads; a familiar one.

"Yeeahooee!" Their heads all turned upward at this, and saw Sithpha falling straight towards them. Reacting quickly, Arthur and Willis rushed underneath him. Sithpha connected with them, and the three collapsed in a stunned, crumpled heap for a few seconds. Reasonably unhurt except for a few superficial scrapes and bruises, the three picked themselves up.

"What else did we break besides his fall?" Willis asked.

"I don't know, but it's getting to become a habit," replied Arthur.

Justin was livid. "How can you two joke about this? This...this worm is the one that led us into this mess!" he shouted, pointing at Sithpha, who clearly was aware that Justin was directing his anger at him, though they could no longer understand each other with the loss of the jewel. Justin began moving menacingly toward him, hand on machete handle. "I should take care of you right here and now!" Sithpha sank down against the wall, shielding his face with his hands, talking unintelligibly but certainly fearfully.

Justin pulled the machete from its holder.

The other three rushed up to Justin, restraining him.

"Justin, you can't kill him," said Arthur. "It'd be murder!"

"He's right, Justin," agreed Mrs. Brisby. "What good would it do? Please, we're all trapped together now," she pleaded.

Sithpha, cowering, let out an anguished cry that stopped all of them in their tracks.

"You see, Justin?" said Willis. "Look at him. Look at his face. He's not to blame for this."

Mrs. Brisby walked over to Sithpha's side and placed a hand on his trembling shoulder. "He's right, Justin, look at him." There was, even in his alien face, a recognizable expression of anguish and shame. Justin indeed recognized this, and it was a mirror of himself.

"I think he's just as much a victim as we are," Mrs. Brisby added. She continued to comfort him.

Arthur and Willis loosened their grip on Justin, who suddenly looked drained. He dropped his machete and wearily shuffled towards the opposite wall. He sank down to the ground and thought about what he had almost done. Arthur and Willis came and kneeled beside him. "I can't believe that was me there," he said with a tremble in his voice. "..that raving maniac you saw. I almost killed him, just as cold-heartedly as Jenner killed Nicodemus. And I yelled at you...my friends. And.." he exclaimed to Mrs. Brisby specifically, "..you especially! I'm supposed to be your leader, and look at how I've acted. Look what I've gotten you all into. Mr. Ages once said that he couldn't see what Nicodemus saw in me. Maybe he was right. This is all my fault."

Mrs. Brisby joined the others at Justin's side, and they all vehemently disagreed.

"Oh, no, Justin, you can't say that. We were all taken in by Ghormfisk," Willis said.

"If it's anyone's fault, it's mine," said Mrs. Brisby. "I let him look at the stone."

"No, Mrs. Brisby, Willis is right. The fault lies with none of us. Ghormfisk probably would have forcibly taken the jewel from you anyway," said Arthur. "For now, the most important thing is that we're all in this together now, the five of us, and among all of us we've got to concentrate on a way out of here."

"Yes," said Justin, forcing a faint smile, "you're right. I know that now. If you'd just leave me alone for a while...."

"Of course," said Arthur, and the three again turned their attention towards Sithpha, who was now scratching at the thin layer of dirt on the floor of their prison with his finger. When he saw the three approaching him, he motioned for them to watch what he was doing.

They watched as he traced, with his finger, a figure in the dirt, which he then pointed to, and then to himself. Obviously this figure represented himself. He scratched in other figures: one about his size and shape, and three smaller ones. His family, they realized. Over them he scratched in a thick-bodied figure with four arms. "Ghormfisk," he told them, though it was certainly obvious. But what was Ghormfisk's connection with Sithpha's family? Through further gestures and dirt-pictures, the truth was starting to emerge.

Mrs. Brisby went over to Justin. "Justin? Please, come over with us. You should see this," she told him gently.

Soon, it all became too clear: Ghormfisk was holding Sithpha's family somewhere, in an unknown location, to ensure Sithpha's servitude to him through threats to their lives. Sithpha knew that Ghormfisk had powers and abilities to carry out his threats if he so desired.

The four friends reacted to this revelation with a mixture of sympathy for him, further anger toward Ghormfisk, but Justin was thunderstruck. "All

he wanted...was to be reunited with his loved ones. No different than us. And I...almost.." He came forward and embraced Sithpha,apologizing profusely and vowing through tears that he would do everything in his power to set things right.

Soon they set about assessing their predicament the best they could. There were the questions of why and how...why Ghormfisk behaved as he did, enslaving Sithpha, imprisoning all of them, what he meant by saying nothing would stand in his way; his way of what? What was his goal, and why did he need the amulet? He obviously knew much about the amulet, perhaps even more than they, which wasn't really too surprising, for all they did know. When he took control of it, his words and actions seemed sheer madness personified. What had he to gain by trapping them? This apparant fact made their situation all the more bewildering.

They opened the floor to suggestions on escape. It was already determined that there was only a thin layer of dirt beneath them, and underneath was solid rock with no discernible gaps or cracks. They kept trying, though, scraping at the dirt with their machete blades. Their only other alternative was to climb out, but how? The sides were smooth as glass without the slightest irregularities with which to secure a grip. And, at present, night had fallen, so they couldn't see to put any such plan into action. Soon, exhausted by their trials, they fell into sleep.

The following morning, they all felt much rested, though hardly relieved. As the suns climbed, so did the temperature, and as Arthur predicted, the heat inside their prison became stifling, making it even more difficult to concentrate on any plan of escape. Willis suggested they try carving hand- and foot-holds in the wall, but Arthur reasoned that that would be next to impossible without the proper tools, especially as they got higher, even if they were able to cut into the rock. They tried it with their machetes, but they predictably proved to be woefully inadequate; they only made the barest nicks and scratches in the surface. Their situation was surely looking increasingly hopeless, and was compounded by the fact that they hadn't the chance to grab all their gear before being trapped, and so there was only a bare minimum of food and water to sustain them, and then for a day more at the most.

Everyone made an effort to stave off the despair that was starting to creep over them all, but Willis's natural-born sense of humor was becoming strained; and Arthur, the most technically-oriented one among them, had run out of ideas and felt as helpless as the others; Justin was beset with many conflicting emotions: guilt and shame over his threat on Sithpha's life; his still-smoldering desire for revenge on Ghormfisk; the not-entirely-banished notion that all this was his fault; the overall hopelessness of their predicament; and the realization that there was indeed one he himself might've loved, whom he might never see again. Somehow, even amidst all this, he vowed to not give in completely to despair, and allow himself a glimmer of hope.

As for Mrs. Brisby, many of Justin's thoughts were echoed in her. She had remained steadfastly optimistic thus far, and still was. She realized that she might never see her children again, might never find out whether or not Johnathan was truly alive; but she also remembered that there was this same feeling of hopelessness and reaching dead ends in last spring's crisis. And there were still those words, that inscription on the reverse side of the amulet. She mustn't give up hope, she kept telling herself. There must be a key.

Several miles to the southwest, Ghormfisk stood atop a tall bluff. This was just the right type of location, he thought. From all the research, surveying and samples he had taken, he knew the raw materials were available. With the jewel in his possession, there was nothing to keep him from accom-

plishing what he desired most. The jewel glowed, and the ground seemed to swell. Boulders and chunks of ore flew upwards and surrounded him. The jewel's power then began shaping these raw materials, combining, smelting, creating new alloys. It was quite the spectacle to the local populace, many of whom watched from a safe distance. Indeed, there seemed to be no malice in his actions, only a deep sense of purpose. If those whom he'd entrapped could see him right now, though, they would wonder: for this he'd left them to die? What had this to do with them? His previous actions had been pure madness, and now he seemed quite rational, in control of all his mental faculties.

But, by now, he'd seemed to have forgotten all about those he'd entrapped.

9. Rescue

After the second night, there was no key in sight. There was also very little hope left.

What remained of their provisions was being rationed at the barest minimum, though they all knew it was only a token effort to stave off the inevitable.

And worst of all, the heat was beginning to take its toll. In the middle of the day, Mrs. Brisby collapsed from heat exhaustion. The others did what they could to shield her from the direct sunlight as it passed over their prison, and Sithpha, who was more accustomed to extremes in temperature, shielded her with his own body much of the time. The three rats, by now, had started to become delirious, their principal desire respite--any respite--from the heat.

"Gwinthrayle! How goes it?"

"I've made some further discoveries, my friend, though how they all fit together I'm only beginning to unravel. Near as I can discern, your wife and at least one of your friends that we've been attempting to contact is indeed no longer on your world."

"Wait, now, you don't mean they're..."

"No, they're quite alive and well, but there's more. The amulet which sent you here is also missing. And I've traced its presence here, on our world, beginning in the Cavern of Change."

"But...that means that...they could be here! Now, on this world! What else have you found?" Gwinthrayle's friend asked anxiously.

"I've just begun tracing where the jewel has gone. Come over here, to the mirror." This was a seemingly ordinary pane of glass, set in an ornate frame. "The trail led here," he explained further as images began filling the screen, showing a circular stone house at the edge of a clearing.

"That's Ghormfisk's house. What would the jewel have to do with him?"

"I'm afraid I might know the answer. There is an anomaly here.." Gwinthrayle observed, as he and his friend both noticed for the first time what was in his front yard. (Gwinthrayle had traced the jewel's "trail" only as far as the point just before Ghormfisk's house when his friend entered the room.)

"Well, he's certainly acquiring strange tastes in sculpture."

"I'll bring in the view more closely," said Gwinthrayle. They could now see the hole at the top.

"It looks like a smokestack. I wonder if anything's in there."

As Gwinthrayle brought the view down into the "smokestack", they watched for signs of anything else unusual. "I'll provide us some illumination," said Gwinthrayle. Since it was shortly past sunset, there was very little light to see by the deeper they went, so Gwinthrayle cast a spell providing them with some.

"The sides are smooth as glass. Could he be holding someone prisoner?"

"I couldn't begin to guess. There was no way of telling what his irrational behavior months ago was leading to. I should have kept track more closely." The view was now being brought down closer to the bottom, and both of them drew in their breaths at the sight revealed to them. "So Ghormfisk has imprisoned someone."

"We don't yet know for sure that he was responsible, Gwinthrayle; perhaps we should..." He stopped short, gasping with recognition. "Gwinthrayle, I... I know them! They're my friends from Earth! That's Justin, and that's Arthur, and I think that's Willis...they did come here! I don't know that one, he seems to be one of your own people..." He turned to Gwinthrayle before either of them noticed that there was one more occupant, hidden behind the unfamiliar one. "We've got to rescue them, Gwinthrayle! They look like they're dying! My god, there's no telling how long they've been in there! How they must have suffered!"

"Calm down, my friend, while I concentrate on a spell of transportation." As they walked out of the house, Gwinthrayle began gesturing and incanting, and soon both felt themselves lifted in the air, carried aloft as if in giant invisible hands, towards the southeast.

"If Ghormfisk is responsible for this, then let me tell you, Gwinthrayle, he'll live to regret it. No one treats Johnathan Brisby's friends like caged animals!"[5]

Sithpha continued watching over Mrs. Brisby protectively, remembering the kindness she had shown him when they were first imprisoned. He was certain he would probably outlive them all, but not for very long; for now, though, he would do what he could for them. It was the least he could do for them, he thought, after leading them into this. But after all, his own family's lives were at stake; what else could he have done? And now, ironically, he might not live to see them again. His own desire for revenge on Ghormfisk was certainly as strong as Justin's, at least at first, but by now he felt much as they did, that there was nothing left for any of them except to wait for death.

He looked up at the twilight, through the top opening; at least the night offered some respite from the heat. Leaning against the wall, he lowered his head and closed his eyes for a few minutes; then, it almost seemed as though it was actually getting lighter. He opened his eyes. There was indeed a faint glow in the chamber. It couldn't be morning already, he thought at first. Then he looked up, and his eyes grew wide with disbelief. He got up and went around to the others, shaking them awake. Mrs. Brisby, though, would not wake; indeed, she seemed more dead than alive.

The source of the light, which steadily grew brighter as it got lower, proved to be two figures, apparantly floating on air, down towards them, Sithpha observed. One was of Sithpha's own race, though somewhat older and dressed in a multicolored robe. It was from him,seemingly, that the light emanated. His smaller companion was of the same type as Mrs. Brisby.

"It is them, Gwinthrayle!" the smaller one exclaimed urgently (though, of course, Sithpha couldn't understand his words). "I could hardly believe it before, but now...Justin! Arthur! Willis! It's you! It's really you!"

The three rats looked up disbelievingly at the familiar voice. Justin was the first to speak. "Johnathan?" he said deliriously. All three believed him and Gwinthrayle to be hallucinations at first.

The two newcomers settled down on the floor. "It's really me, fellas!

---

5. At this point, I believe it's worth pointing out that I wasn't exactly bending over backwards trying to keep the identity of Gwinthrayle's friend a secret. I just thought that, for the proper dramatic effect, his name should be kept under wraps until the right moment.

Johnathan! This is Gwinthrayle, he can get us all out of here. And not a moment too soon, from the looks of..." His voice suddenly left him as he finally noticed--and recognized--the fifth occupant, lying unconscious alongside the wall. Recognition was followed by shock and the feeling that his heart was dropping, and as if the floor was giving way beneath him. After only a few seconds that seemed like an eternity, he finally found words: "Madeline... My god, Madeline!"[6] He rushed to her side. To have been separated for so long, and now to see her like this: ill, and perhaps dying, if not dead already, was too much to bear.

Gwinthrayle came over to them, not as shocked, but very surprised to see Mrs. Brisby, since he hadn't seen the fifth occupant in the mirror either. "How is she, Johnathan?"

Fighting down swiftly rising panic, he said, "There's o-only a faint heartbeat, Gwinthrayle. You've got to..please...she's.." He was weeping openly now as he held her to him.

"I sense she and your friends will recover fully, Johnathan. Please calm down. We will take them from here immediately." He began concentrating anew on the spell of transportation.

Willis, who, with Arthur and Justin, had observed this whole scene, said weakly, "M-Madeline? I thought her name was..." It occurred to the three of them just then that they had never known her first name. Then, as Gwinthrayle's spell began taking effect, they and Sithpha were quite startled.

Johnathan, his characteristic cool self-possession returning, assured the others not to worry as all seven of them began rising upwards, toward the top opening. He himself had no doubt about Gwinthrayle's assurance of Madeline's and the others' recovery, but all the same would not leave her side.

Soon, they reached the top, and then Ghormfisk's once-prison was dark and empty.

10. Reunions and Revelations

"I think she's starting to come around."

It was the first real voice she had heard in a seeming eternity, though she didn't realize it at first. She slowly became aware that she was lying on something quite comfortable,and that the air seemed cooler--much cooler than--

In an instant she remembered it all: her friends' and her own entrapment, the feelings of despair and helplessness, hardly any food or water, and the awful, overpowering heat. Were these new sensations only a dream? Was she still trapped there? With a feeling of rising panic, she opened her eyes. And immediately saw a familiar and friendly face.

"J-Justin?" It hardly sounded like her own voice to her, since it felt so strange to speak again.

"Yes, it's really me. We're all glad to see you awake. You gave us a bit of a scare. Welcome back." He leaned forward and hugged her.

She looked all around. She was in a small, very comfortable bed in a room that seemed strangely familiar. Arthur, Willis, and Sithpha were also standing by, and each took turns welcoming her back to the world of the living.

She raised herself up in bed, breathing a huge sigh of relief. "It's true, it's really true, then. We're out of there. But...where are we now?"

A new figure, one she didn't know, stepped forward. "Mrs. Brisby...I am Gwinthrayle, and you and your friends are guests in my home. I'm very pleased

---

6. Why Madeline? Well, I certainly couldn't have Johnathan call her Mrs. Brisby. Seriously, it's because I like the name, and it seemed to fit her.

to see you're almost recovered." Mrs. Brisby looked toward Justin questioningly.

"Don't worry,we're definitely among friends here," he assured her. "And... more than friends."

Another figure stepped from behind Gwinthrayle. "Hello, Madeline," he said somewhat breathlessly.

In the next instant she was confused. Who knew her first name? Who else but...and then she turned to face the source of the voice. A voice she knew. And a face she recognized. She gasped as she did, and also realized why this room had seemed familiar. It was the room she had seen as an image in the red amulet. "Johnathan?" She barely said the name aloud. Then the full realization came upon her in a rush. She had thought him still alive, and she'd been right. Johnathan rushed forward and crushed her to him. "Oh, Johnathan! It is you! You're alive! Alive!" she cried as she threw her arms around him. And then, for Madeline, all the trials and terrors of the past two days were suddenly forgotten. Now, for both of them, there was nothing else, nothing except each other, two long-lost lovers together again. And then,neither could speak.

Gwinthrayle, Justin and the others made a discreet exit from the room, closing the door behind them. Justin found the Brisbys' joy infectious and even found himself laughing, feeling better than he had in months. "Gwinthrayle, I don't know how to thank you. You not only saved all our lives, but you've brought a dear friend back to us, and a husband back to another dear friend."

"Yes, it's been only a few hours since you rescued us, but except for Mrs. Brisby, we're totally recovered," said Arthur.

"It was some very simple spells which enabled you all to recover. For Mrs. Brisby, it will be a bit longer before she's as strong as before, since the heat exhaustion and dehydration took a greater toll on her. But.." Gwinthrayle said with a smile, nodding towards the room they just left, "..it will be a much faster recovery now."

"I'm still reeling over all this," Willis said with a tone of wonder, "and I'm supposed to be the skeptical one. All this magic stuff I'd never placed much stock in before. But if it weren't for it, and you, we'd all be baked potatoes right now. And Johnathan alive! Wow..." He was still shaking his head in disbelief.

"Friends," said Sithpha, "I'm really glad that you don't hate me anymore for what I did, even though I really couldn't blame you if you did." They could understand each other again due to another of Gwinthrayle's "simple spells".

"Friend, don't even think it," Justin said, putting an arm around his new friend's shoulder. "If anyone should apologize around here, it's yours truly. I was all ready to lop your head off, but as it turned out, you were in much the same boat as the rest of us." He still winced at the memory of his actions, of feeling no better than Jenner, but it was no longer painful to talk about it. Gwinthrayle's recovery spells did their work even better than he thought, Justin decided.

"Well, thanks, Justin. You know, I'm just as tickled as the rest of you to see Mrs. Brisby and Johnny back together, but...what about the jewel? There's no telling what Ghormfisk's been up to with it," Sithpha reminded them. "And...my own family..."

"He's right, Gwinthrayle," Arthur added. "Earlier you mentioned that you knew Ghormfisk. What's his game? And for that matter, what about Johnathan? How did you and him get together? How..."

Gwinthrayle raised both forearms, palms out. "Perfectly reasonable questions, and ones for which answers are forthcoming. For now, let me assure you that as far as Ghormfisk is concerned, no one, save perhaps himself, is

in immediate danger. In the morning, we will all learn from each other what we know. But for now, you must all rest. Good night to all of you." With that, he turned towards his own quarters, and the others turned towards the quarters prepared for them.

"Hospitable fellow," remarked Willis, "but awfully secretive."

"I don't think he's so much secretive," said Arthur. "I think he just meant that it's best that all of us should be together to hear each other's story."

Justin agreed, then said, "As you might think, I was a bit suspicious at first, but then, none of us were in any condition to do much about it at the time. But Johnathan vouches for him, and he's made all of us better, so I feel we can trust him. Johnathan...wow." The feeling of emancipation from Ghormfisk's prison had been so strong that all of them had only begun to absorb the impact of Johnathan's being alive. Justin thought about he and Mrs. Brisby's being reunited, and still so much in love, and found himself again thinking about someone he cared for--perhaps even loved--as he had while entrapped. Isabella. He couldn't seem to stop thinking about her. A fierce resolve rose within him, to find Ghormfisk, take back the jewel, see Sithpha reunited with his family, and everyone else back where they belonged. He no longer wanted Ghormfisk dead, but vowed that he wouldn't go unpunished. He wondered, though, what Gwinthrayle had meant by saying that Ghormfisk's own life might be in danger. That, he decided, would also wait until morning.

As they all settled down to sleep, Justin felt more at peace with himself than in ages.

And, to the southeast, Ghormfisk, utilizing the jewel's transporting abilities, appeared at the top of the cylindrical prison he'd made. Making his way down, he was startled to see that his captives were gone. "No trace of them," he observed. "I wonder where they've gone?" His surprise seemed almost to be mixed with...concern? "I do hope I hadn't hurt them, but...my machine; yes, my machine. I must return to it now." He rose out of the tower, and literally in a flash, was back at his construction site, far to the southwest, his once-captives seemingly again forgotten. "Aah, yes...it's progressing very well. Soon, I'll test it, and then I'll be gone from here." He resumed construction, shaping crystal rods and delicate circuitry.

The following morning, they all awakened to a feeling of unparalleled vigor and well-being, a ready-to-take-on-the-world feeling. Truly, they agreed, with a certain amount of awe, this was indeed a house of healing.

There was a sumptuous breakfast awaiting them, with many foods unfamiliar to them, but which, Gwinthrayle had earlier assured them, were safe and nutritious for them. They found the food quite delicious upon sampling it.

Presently, Johnathan and Madeline joined them. She appeared much stronger, almost fully recovered. Again Justin felt a great surge of optimism at seeing them together. They sat down, and Johnathan told them all about the food they were eating. Gwinthrayle entered the room from his study.

"I've traced Ghormfisk to a location far to the south," Gwinthrayle announced. "As I had suspected no one is in immediate danger, though he still possesses the jewel and is utilizing its power."

"How is he using it, Gwinthrayle? Shouldn't we go after him right away?" asked Justin anxiously.

"For now, Justin, I believe the stories that all of you as well as myself have to tell each other are the more pressing matter," Gwinthrayle said.

They all looked at each other. They were all burning with curiosity, but hardly knew where and with whom to begin. Mrs. Brisby finally spoke up first. "I guess I'll start. I...hardly even told Johnathan anything last night," she said smiling, feeling herself blush.

"Nor I her," added Johnathan. "There was no need for words." They clearly were still intoxicated by each other's presence, so much that the others almost felt like voyeurs in their presence.

Madeline began by telling about the night Johnathan vanished. "Auntie Shrew broke the news to me that Johnathan had died, after she'd heard it from one of the other animals in the field, who had heard it from another, and so on down the grapevine, and I'd no reason to doubt that it was true, from previous experience. It...was very hard for awhile, but the children and I managed." She clearly found it difficult to discuss this period in detail. "From then on, I virtually abandoned my first name; I wanted only to be referred to as Mrs. Brisby, as a loving legacy to Johnathan's memory." She went on to describe Timothy's bout with pneumonia, and all the subsequent events of last spring. Johnathan listened enthralled by her descriptions of meeting Jeremy, narrowly escaping Dragon, her attempt to stop the tractor (which even Johnathan could hardly believe; "Even I wouldn't attempt that," he remarked), her meeting with the Great Owl and then the Rats. Justin joined in at this point, and together they detailed her initial difficulty in getting the Rats to help her, her meeting with Nicodemus, who presented the amulet to her, her capture in and escape from the Fitzgibbons' kitchen, Jenner's treachery(which Justin still found difficult to talk about) which led to Nicodemus's death, the amulet's power saving the children, and the Rats' desperate but successful scramble to vacate their former colony and cover their tracks to avoid detection by NIMH, and their move to Thorn Valley. Madeline further described the "impressions", the dreams she'd experienced which led to her and the children's own sojourn to Thorn Valley, and so on up to their rescue from Ghormfisk's prison. The full story left Johnathan very impressed.

"That makes my own story seem almost dull by comparison," he remarked half-kiddingly. Hearing about Jenner's treachery and Nicodemus's death had come as quite a shock to him, adding that he'd known Jenner was becoming cold-hearted and vehemently opposed the Plan, but never suspected he'd go so far (Justin took some small comfort in hearing this). He then asked Gwinthrayle, "Those 'impressions', the dreams Maddy and the others had; they were the result of our attempts to communicate with them, weren't they?"

"Correct, my friend, but that will all brought out in your own story."

Everyone now looked toward Johnathan in anticipation.

"My last night on Earth," he began, "started when I left Madeline and the children just before sundown. I told them I had some business to conduct, friends to visit; she was always so tolerant of my little secrets. I met with Nicodemus, who was still holding the jewel at that time, and I told him that I thought I might have need of its power that night; no more than a hunch, really, I thought at the time. I had told Nicodemus earlier, and this night I reminded him again, that in the event of my death or disappearance, I wanted Madeline to have it, because I thought its power would protect her and the children. I think, even to him, there was much about the jewel that was still a mystery."

"Yes," Madeline added soberly, "Even he thought you were dead." Then she added, "I don't mean to interrupt your story, Johnathan, but there's still much that I--and the Rats--didn't know about Nicodemus, like those powers he'd shown."

Johnathan shrugged. "I couldn't tell you much more than you already know. I don't know if you were ever told this, but some months after we left NIMH, we spent an entire winter in a human house, reading the thousands of books there. Nicodemus had read a bit about magic there, and later was trying out spells for himself, but I don't believe that, as a wizard or sorceror, he ever became very powerful. In truth, he was about as secretive with me as with the rest of you, but..he was still a good friend." He lowered his head, then continued with his story.

"Anyway, this night, after I left Nicodemus, I met with Justin, Arthur and Willis outside the farmhouse. We reviewed our operations for that night, and then set off. I went into the farmhouse kitchen, as usual, to put Ages' sleeping powder into Dragon's bowl. Again I felt that I'd best have the amulet with me the whole time. Perhaps that's what slowed me down this night. I waited for Mrs. Fitzgibbons to cross the kitchen to the back door before making my move, as usual, but I was a second or two too slow. After I put it in and started back for the hole in the floor, Dragon saw me, raced towards me, and I could see I was too far from the hole to reach it in time. So I ran the opposite way, to the other end of the kitchen, towards the broom closet door, which was ajar, just enough for me to squeeze through. In a flash, Dragon had pushed his nose through the opening, widening it, and followed me inside. I was cornered behind the upright vacuum, and I don't mind telling you, I was scared stiff, but I wasn't about to give in without a fight. I took off the amulet, and as Dragon thrust his face forward, I swung it with all my might, hitting him directly in the nose. He screeched and reared back, surprised that I'd put up such a fight, but I knew I'd not get a second chance. Seconds later, he was back and I could see I'd given him a bloody nose."

The others looked at each other with the same realization of why there were bloodstains found on and around the jewel. Johnathan continued his narrative:

"I wished I were anyplace but there. Dragon was again inches from me, and my last thought before what I thought to be the end was a fervent wish that my family be protected and well looked after. I swung the jewel at Dragon's face one last, desperate time...

"And I felt the strangest, most indescribable sensation, followed by blackness. I felt weak and nauseous, not to mention confused. What had just happened? It was clear to me that I was alive, but now somewhere else. Well, to make a long story short (or at least slightly shorter), I was in the same cave that welcomed all of you to this world. I found my way out, and let me tell you, even with all I'd seen and done in my time, nothing prepared me for this. In retrospect, it was certainly a beautiful world I'd found myself in, but at the time all I knew was that I had no idea where I was, nor how to get back home. It occurred to me then that it probably was the jewel that got me into this fix, but now it couldn't get me out. I recalled my last thoughts before it happened, how I wished to be elsewhere, and wished my family to be well protected. And this was how my wishes were answered, I figured. I was scared out of my wits at first--more than I'd ever been--and almost fell into despair, but soon realized that I had no right to give up. I determined to make the best of the situation.

"At that time, it was summer on Earth, but here it was this world's equivalent of early spring. The seasons on this world, I found out later, run at different lengths than on Earth, due to a longer path around its suns, one that's also quite irregular, making for greater extremes in seasonal temperatures as well. I shudder to think what would've happened if I'd arrived in the middle of winter. The days and nights are also longer than on Earth, I found, by about five hours.

"At any rate, I set about carefully sampling the local plant life; I knew the potential for danger, but I wasn't about to starve to death either. I occasionally sampled something that didn't agree with me, but luckily that's as bad as it got.

"For a while, I made my home just inside the cave--the one we all know--and sometimes I'd go back in, to the point where I arrived, to see if there was a clue--the barest hint of a clue,even--as to how I might find a way back. Before long, I gave up, and moved away from the cave altogether. Never for a minute did I forget my life on Earth, but I was also overcome by curiosity; I wanted to see more of this world. So I set out wandering. Occasionally I'd

make contact with some of the local inhabitants, and strangely enough, they weren't particularly shocked or surprised to see someone so different from them. I learned more about that later.

"I certainly found much to like about this world; there were no large carnivorous animals, the people seemed friendly, and there was some gorgeous scenery. And yet, that served to remind me all the more of all that had been taken from me. It was hard, at times, but I managed.

"Then, one day, Gwinthrayle found me. He had been observing me, he said, for some time, and was interested in hearing how I'd come to be here. Despite the strange powers he displayed (or perhaps because of them; much about him reminded me of Nicodemus), I felt I had nothing to distrust in him; certainly I had nothing to lose. He invited me to his home, which he told me also served as a hospice, a haven for travelers from far away. He also told me how this world, for reasons even he couldn't completely fathom, had a tendency to attract travelers from other dimensions, particularly ones our size. The cave that I--and you--arrived in (the Cavern of Change, he called it) sometimes was the entry point, sometimes not; but he had hosted many and varied such beings over the years. Some had the means to leave here on their own; some, like myself, hadn't. And there were occasionally those who arrived here by scientific means.

"I explained to him my situation, and when I told him of the jewel, he grew very interested as I described its abilities and how I found it. He said he had heard of such a jewel, and that if you found it and it manifested its power through you, it meant you were...chosen by it, or whoever ultimately controls it, and would be forever changed. 'That's all well and good,' I told him, not really believing it at first, 'but if I'm so special, why did it strand me here?' and he answered that there was much even he didn't know about it. Something about a 'higher purpose'...."

"Yes," added Gwinthrayle, "and since it manifested its power through you, as well, Mrs. Brisby, it means you have also been 'chosen'."

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Brisby, "Isn't there any more you can tell us about it? 'Chosen' by whom?"

"I wish I could tell more. But even with the long years at developing my own skills, certain pieces of knowledge are still denied me. But I began doing what I could to help Johnathan, by utilizing spells which, hopefully, would put him in contact with his loved ones.."

"The 'impressions' that Justin, Mr. Ages, and I received!" Mrs. Brisby exclaimed.

"Yes. The first one we tried to contact was Nicodemus; from what Johnathan told me of his abilities, he would've been the most adept at dealing with the situation. But from what you've told me now, he must have been dead by that time. So we began trying making contact with you and some of Johnathan's (and your) friends."

"Because my feelings for you were the strongest," Johnathan told Madeline, "that must've been why you received the strongest contact."

"We're sorry it caused you such great anxiety and discomfort, but I knew no other way," said Gwinthrayle.

"It's all right," said Mrs. Brisby. "I don't mind. After all, the results are what really matter."

"True," continued Gwinthrayle, "but to return to the amulet: one thing I had learned was how someone with greedy or self-serving motives could subvert it to his use; one not 'chosen'. This is where Ghormfisk comes in. He was one of those, as Johnathan mentioned earlier, who arrived here by scientific means. He was well-known and respected in his scientific field on his own world, and had invented an interdimensional travel device and tested it on himself. Unfortunately, the return device which he had brought with him was damaged in transit, and he also became stranded here. I took him in, as

earlier with Johnathan, and for a while I searched for the means to contact his homeworld as well. But after several days, he began acting strangely; changes in behavior, subtle at first, but soon he'd become angry and irrational at times, though other times he'd be as usual, calm and level-headed. Soon he left here, shouting angrily that he was wasting his time here. Johnathan thought his problem might be similar to a condition he'd read about called manic depression, fairly common among humans on your world. Neither of us knew for sure. At any rate, while he was here, I mentioned to Johnathan how one not 'chosen' could take control of the jewel with the correct spell. And the conclusion I've reached now is that Ghormfisk learned of it. I was privately telling it to Johnathan sometime after Ghormfisk began behaving strangely, and he evidently overheard it. Before then, I had, at his request, taught him a few simple, and, so I thought, harmless spells, which he didn't seem to take too seriously at the time, but it probably was through the utilization of one of them that he learned this spell.

"And now, he has evidently taken control of it. He must have gotten curious about the amulet when he saw you with it, and recited the spell just to see if it was indeed the one he'd heard about. There are other things that he hadn't learned about it, though."

"What other things?" asked Arthur.

"For one, a 'fail-safe' characteristic of the jewel. If Ghormfisk uses its power specifically to kill, its power would be turned back on him."

They all looked at each other. Finally Justin said, "Maybe that would be the best thing for him, after what he put us through."

"But, Justin," Johnathan said, "you heard Gwinthrayle. Ghormfisk may be irresponsible for his own actions. And besides, there's a chance the jewel could be lost again."

Justin turned to face his old friend. "Johnathan, I've always respected your judgements and opinions, and I still do. It's just that you didn't spend two days--longer days than what we're used to, at that--in that hellhole. I just can't see him going unpunished."

"Very understandable, Justin," Gwinthrayle replied, "and we will confront him directly, as soon as everyone feels up to it. Mrs. Brisby?"

"I'm quite all right, Gwinthrayle, thank you. I feel much better.One more question, though: why didn't the jewel turn on Ghormfisk instead of creating the prison? Wasn't he trying to kill us then?"

"No, only imprison you. Your lives were not in immediate danger, and so the 'fail-safe' spell didn't take hold."

"I see. Well, I'll join the rest of you in a little while. Right now, though, I'd like a few more minutes alone with Johnathan."

"Of course, my dear." The two reunited lovers walked out into an adjacent garden.

Sithpha,almost forgotten in the midst of all the storytelling, said, "Wow. You folks have sure been through the wringer, and for quite a while, too. I'm really confused by a lot of that talk about other worlds, though."

"It was confusing to us, too, when Justin brought forth the idea when we arrived," said Arthur. He sighed greatly. "I hope everything turns out like it should."

The twin suns shone brightly over Gwinthrayle's garden, and the rolling, forested hills that surrounded his home.

"Your friend has such a beautiful home," Madeline said.

Johnathan nodded. "This world is beautiful. If...when we succeed in retaking the jewel, I'll almost hate to leave it. I've come to regard it almost as much home as the one we left. But, for all that Gwinthrayle's friendship means to me, it means so much more to be with you and the children again."

They held each other close. Soon Madeline said, "The children. How they

must be worried sick over me right now. I never told them where I was going, or why. What could I tell them? And how will they deal with your being alive?"

"Things have happened so fast, I've hardly had the time to consider that myself. But I'm certain they'll handle it fine," Johnathan assured her.

"I do hope so. I'm not really worried, but I am concerned." Then she added, "I wonder how I've been 'forever changed', as Gwinthrayle said."

"I...couldn't really say. Maybe we should ask him later." Just then, it occurred to Johnathan that Madeline seemed younger than she should be. He recalled what he couldn't bring himself to tell her before his "death", how he would stay young, due to the injections he'd received at NIMH, while she would age normally. Perhaps...no, he decided, best not to say anything to her now. He would ask Gwinthrayle later. Then he said, "I think I've certainly been changed, though, from this experience."

"Something else occurred to me, after you described how the jewel stranded you here. What if...the same thing had happened to me, if I'd been wearing the jewel when I was doing the same thing you were when you disappeared?" Madeline speculated. Both shuddered as the full implications sank in. She probably would've been reunited with Johnathan right then. But at what cost? She wouldn't have been present to warn the Rats that the men from NIMH would be arriving the following morning with their poison gas, nor to save her children from suffocation, trapped in their house, as it sank into the mud. Of course, it wouldn't had to have happened this way, but the possibility had been there.

Again they held each other. "Let's just be glad it didn't," said Johnathan. "Come on, let's go join the others. After all, we've got a life to get back to."

11. The Amulet Regained

Ghormfisk was talking to himself again.

In front of him, the fruits of his past three days' labors sprawled across the surface of the high bluff. "Not long now. Just a few minor adjustments...Aah! Must get rid of this garbage..." With the amulet glowing, various types of debris, strewn about the mesa in disarray, lifted from the ground, enveloped in the red glow. With a careless toss, the debris was flung over the side of the bluff. Still glowing, certain pieces, flung further than most, plunged straight toward three of the local blue-skinned inhabitants.

"Look out, Mother!" The older son saw it coming first, and pushed his mother and younger brother to the ground, trying to shield them from injury with his own body.

"Wait...look!" the younger brother yelled. Looking up, he had seen the falling, glowing debris swerve from its downward path and fall harmlessly away from them.

"He might have killed us!" the mother exclaimed. "And he didn't even notice!" But the scene did not go completely unnoticed.

"Johnathan, I will never, as long as I live, get used to this kind of travel."

"Not much choice, Willis," Johnathan replied, "and it does get us there."

"Are we almost there?" asked Madeline, clinging close to Johnathan and covering her eyes.

Johnathan noticed this and remarked, "I thought after flying with that crow that you weren't so afraid of heights anymore."

"N-Not when there's something I can see under me," she replied nervously.

Gwinthrayle's spell of transportation was taking them all, all seven of them, many miles to the south, to the point where his skills told him Ghorm-

fisk was utilizing the jewel's power. "We're almost there, my friends. Just beyond this mountain."

"There's a glow from behind it," observed Arthur.

"What is he doing with the jewel?" wondered Johnathan.

The glow they all saw was plainly visible even though it was mid-afternoon. Gwinthrayle brought them down lower, to a spot from which they could observe the spectacle hopefully without being seen immediately. Madeline especially was relieved to have them on solid ground again. They all peered over the rise to see what Ghormfisk was up to.

It was indeed a spectacle. Ghormfisk had built a massive, glowing device taking up the greater amount of space atop a stone bluff. The earth surrounding it had been torn up where the jewel's power had ripped the raw materials from it. The device itself was an amalgam of multicolored wires, crystal tubing, metal framework and many other parts indescribably alien to all their eyes; and, here was Ghormfisk standing right in the midst of it all.

"What is that he's built?" Justin asked.

"My specialty has always been machines and things mechanical," said Arthur, "but this is totally beyond me."

"Maybe he's tried to duplicate his dimension travel device," Johnathan suggested.

"He's trying to get home? Couldn't the jewel itself do that?" speculated Willis.

"If that's the case, let's count our blessings, and be glad he doesn't seem to know that," said Johnathan sagely.

"This illness, if indeed it is, has affected his mind in ways I never expected," Gwinthrayle observed. "There is a great sense of purpose in his actions now, and yet earlier he imprisoned you all for no reason..."

Madeline made a frightened sound and pointed. Ghormfisk had tossed some debris and scrap over the side of the bluff, and some of it was bearing down on three natives, one of whom could be seen throwing the others and himself to the ground. The debris seemed to fall around them, and landed without touching them.

"They're safe, thank goodness," said Justin with relief. "But how?"

"The 'fail-safe' characteristic," Gwinthrayle explained. "Ghormfisk hadn't deliberately meant them harm, he was just careless, and so the jewel's power protected them."

"That could've been my wife and kids down there," Sithpha said grimly. "Maybe they couldn't have gotten hurt, but he sure scared them half to death. We can't let him get away with any more of this!"

Something else occurred to Johnathan. "If he is trying to go home with that contraption, the jewel could easily go with him. That's all the more reason to stop him now!"

"Curb your impatience, please, all of you," Gwinthrayle advised. "If what I sense is correct, we can let this play itself out."

"I think I believe you," said Johnathan, "but look what's happening now."

The entire device, with Ghormfisk at its center, was glowing more brightly now. For several seconds it continued, and it looked to the hidden observers that he might succeed in his apparant goal; until, suddenly, a crystal tube burst, followed by a shower of sparks, much smoke, and parts of the machine collapsing and bursting into flame. Gwinthrayle warned everyone to duck. There was a series of short, sharp explosions and one larger one, followed by silence. The seven friends cautiously looked up, and saw a flaming heap of debris where Ghormfisk's device had stood. They didn't immediately see Ghormfisk, and some of them, including Johnathan, almost got panicky, until Sithpha said, "Look!" and pointed to the ground below the bluff. To their relief, it was Ghormfisk, still wearing the jewel, having been protected by its power.

"Would everyone agree if I said it's time to make our move?" Johnathan asked.

"Yes, we would, Johnathan," said Gwinthrayle with a grim smile.

Ghormfisk commanded the jewel to let down the protective shield erected to protect him and bring him down to the ground. Almost stumbling over the ravaged ground, he cursed, but then said, "No matter. I still have the jewel, and I'll rebuild, better than before."

"No, Ghormfisk. It's over. Please, give the jewel over. We can help you."

Ghormfisk whirled to face the voice and stared in disbelief. Seemingly floating on air in front of him was Gwinthrayle, accompanied by six others, five of whom he'd imprisoned earlier but now hardly seemed to remember.

"So, Gwinthrayle, we meet again." He sounded almost cordial, but all at once his demeanor seemed to change completely to paranoia. "You were responsible for my machine failing! Will I ever be rid of you? Begone, all of you!" He held up the jewel, which was glowing again. Gwinthrayle quickly erected protective shields around everyone as the jewel's power pushed them all away, and apart from each other.

Ghormfisk turned to concentrate on rebuilding his machine, but in a minute, his "enemies" were back, regrouped. Again he turned, but, without saying anything this time, almost casually gathered up some loose debris, and shaped it into a dome around them.

"Not again!" said Justin.

"No," said Gwinthrayle, "this barrier is not very thick, and I can easily get us out. Right now, it'll provide us time to assess the situation as it stands now."

"If you ask me, Gwinthrayle," observed Willis, "this seems to be pretty much your show. What can the rest of us do? You're the only one of us with the power to deal with him."

"What happens next may indeed depend on one of you, though. Trust me."

"But he's so unpredictable!" Madeline said. "What can any of us do?"

"Please believe me, this will play itself out," Gwinthrayle assured them, and then, concentrating, shattered the dome.

Ghormfisk turned toward them, his demeanor once again paranoic, threatening. "I've warned all of you not to interfere!" he shouted angrily.

"Ghormfisk, please," Gwinthrayle implored him, "there is much you don't know about the jewel. It will turn against you if you..."

"Now you'll all pay!" Ghormfisk shouted, ignoring Gwinthrayle's attempted warning. He pointed to the bluff above them, and as they all watched, a massive chunk of it detached, rose several feet into the air, and began falling straight toward them.

They all comprehended the significance of what Ghormfisk had just done, and remembered Gwinthrayle's assurance of their safety, but the sight of a several-hundred-pound boulder bearing down on them still paralyzed them all with fear. All except Gwinthrayle...and Johnathan.

Ghormfisk's eyes were wild with mad satisfaction as he watched the boulder bear down on his "enemies"; then they grew wide with disbelief as he watched it veer from its downward path and start bearing down toward him.

Johnathan remembered saying how,if it came to this, there was a chance the jewel could be lost again. At this instant, he knew he'd been right. If the boulder killed and buried Ghormfisk, then the jewel...in the next instant, Johnathan's duty was clear. Time seemed to freeze for him as he suddenly dashed out towards Ghormfisk. He heard Madeline gasp in horror. He briefly glimpsed the expression on Ghormfisk's face, and thought he saw both repentence and...relief? He leaped at Ghormfisk's much larger frame with sufficient force to bowl him over and send them both tumbling, over and over on the ground, as he simultaneously felt the shock waves from the boulder meeting

the ground.

For a minute everyone and everything lay unmoving. Then Johnathan sat up shakily, heart beating wildly. He glanced over to his left to see Ghormfisk on his back, supported on his elbows, staring fixedly at the boulder which almost snuffed out both their lives, and which now was imbedded in the earth only inches away. Johnathan's friends came forward,and Ghormfisk, almost catatonic, offered no resistance, nor even seemed to notice, as Johnathan reached over and took the amulet from around his neck, and replaced it around his own. Johnathan turned to face Madeline, and they rushed into each other's arms.

"Oh, Johnathan, don't ever do anything like that again." Madeline was trembling just as much as he was.

"It's all right, darling, everything's all right now. I hope I'll never have to."

Gwinthrayle and the others now stood before Ghormfisk. "I think we should shake some sense into him now," suggested Justin.

"Wait, my friend. I don't think that'll be necessary," advised Gwinthrayle. "Look at him."

Ghormfisk's lips were moving, but no sound came forth at first. At last he said tremulously, "What...have I been...doing?"

They all looked at each other. Had he really been shocked back to his senses? Arthur kneeled and asked him, "Don't you remember anything?"

"I...do." His face looked haunted, but no longer mad. "They were right all along. I knew I should've heeded their warning."

"Whose warning?" Johnathan asked.

"There were those...on my own world who theorized that our race is...tied, I guess you'd say, to our own world, our own dimension. And that if anyone ventured outside of it, the results would be...unexpected."

Johnathan asked incredulously, "Then...just being away from your home dimension ...drove you mad?"

Ghormfisk nodded wearily. "So it now appears." He buried his face in all four hands as the full realization of his actions in the past months dawned on him: his rejection of Gwinthrayle's help, forcing Sithpha into slavery under threats to his family, imprisoning Madeline and the three rats; he remembered it all.

The seven friends looked on; some were confused, some felt sympathy... but there was very little hate left for him, even from Justin. Then the apologies came forth. He was especially sorry to Sithpha for treating him so badly for so long, and vowed to reunite him with his family; and to Madeline and the rats for leaving them to die. Then he thanked all of them for bringing him back to his senses, even though Gwinthrayle told him it was the jewel that did it. "I feel...totally in control now, but I've no idea how long it'll last. If I'd been in control all along, I might have been able to construct my machine to perfection, and I might have reached my own world."

"You mean that <u>was</u> a dimension travel device you were working on?" Johnathan asked.

"Yes." Then, more to himself, he added, "I've got to get back home, warn the world that interdimensional travel is dangerous to our race. And...my family...it's been so long..."

This bit of information hit everyone like a bullet.

"Him too?" blurted Willis, who received a subsequent elbow to the ribs by Arthur.

"Ghormfisk," Gwinthrayle said, "there are other things about the jewel that you'd never learned. Didn't you wonder how Madeline and the others arrived here?"

"It...never occurred to me. I only saw the jewel, and saw that it fit the description I'd heard from you."

"The jewel is what brought them here from their own world. Did you not know that they--and Johnathan--were interdimensional travelers like yourself? They need the jewel to take them home, and it can send you home as well."

Ghormfisk was dumbstruck. After a while he said,"I never knew. If I had, so much could have been avoided."

"If you'd been in complete control," Gwinthrayle reminded him. "But that's all history now. Johnathan?"

He and Madeline came forward. "Are you sure it can be done, Gwinthrayle? Have the jewel send him home while it stays here with us?" Johnathan asked.

"As the chosen ones, you and Madeline must make the right choice, and you will know when you do."

As the two lovers discussed this particular point, Ghormfisk called Sithpha over to him. "Again, please accept my sincerest apologies for the hardships I've caused you and yours, Sithpha, though I could hardly blame you if you never did."

Sithpha thought hard for a while, then said, "Well, I could never forget how it felt to be so humiliated, to be treated like something scraped off your shoe, but...heck, they all say you couldn't help yourself, so I guess I can forgive you. But there's still..."

"The matter of your own family, yes,of course," Ghormfisk added quickly. "They are perfectly safe and sound, and not far from here. And in truth, they were never in any real danger from me." He named and described the town in which they were now located as Johnathan and Madeline came forward.

"We're sure it can be done," Madeline told everyone.

"Yes, and if you're ready, we can begin anytime," Johnathan told Ghormfisk.

"I am ready," said Ghormfisk soberly. Johnathan, wearing the jewel, instructed Ghormfisk to lay his hands ("two of them will do just fine," Johnathan told him) on the jewel, and concentrate on thoughts of his home and family. Before he did this, he once again apologized to everyone, and said goodbye. As before, the jewel glowed red and soon the glow enveloped them both. Everyone else averted their eyes. There was a flash, and everyone returned their gaze to see Johnathan alone with the amulet.

"Come look, everyone," he called out. As everyone gathered around, he pointed to the amulet's face. There was an image, showing only for a few more seconds. It was Ghormfisk, rushing to greet someone he certainly knew.

After the image faded, Madeline said, "I'm glad he made it back. In spite of all he did, I hope everything turns out all right for him." Everyone, even Justin and Sithpha, agreed. Then Justin said, "This got me to thinking...Nicodemus probably knew of the spell that Ghormfisk used to take over the jewel, and that could have been why he was afraid of Jenner getting hold of it. Why else would Jenner have been so possessed to have it? He could already have learned the spell."

"That could be," said Johnathan thoughtfully, "but we'll probably never know for sure, though." He turned to Sithpha. "Well, Sithpha, now it's your turn," announced Johnathan. "Just concentrate on thoughts of your family, and the jewel will pinpoint their location and send you to them."

"Sounds okay to me, Johnny. Well...I guess this is goodbye, everyone. Thanks for all you've done." After all the hugs, handshakes, well-wishing, and all-around goodbyes, Sithpha was ready, and soon he was also on his way home. And again, there was an afterimage in the jewel that showed them that he, too, was with those he loved most.

"Well," said Johnathan to Madeline, "I guess that just leaves me and you." Then, turning to the three rats, he added, grinning, "Yes, and you knuckleheads too." Turning his attention again to the jewel, he then said, "We might have a bit of a wait, though; after the workout Ghormfisk gave it, and those last two sendoffs, I think it needs a little while to recharge before sending

all five of us home."

"I'll bring us all to my home, then," said Gwinthrayle, "so you can make final preparations for your own departure." He began anew the spell of transportation.

12. Homecoming

It was now nearing sunset, and Gwinthrayle, Johnathan and Madeline Brisby, Justin, Arthur and Willis were assembled in the garden outside Gwinthrayle's home. Johnathan had finished packing a few things--momentos, mostly--and now all were almost ready to depart.

Johnathan and Madeline were now "testing" the jewel to see if it was sufficiently "powered up" to transport them all to Earth. But simultaneously, Johnathan was finding something else out. Earlier, he had thought to ask Gwinthrayle about what he suspected to be "forever changed" about Madeline, and he kept putting it off; even after all he'd been through, the courage and daring he'd always shown, he'd been afraid to bring it up, afraid of finding out that what he suspected wasn't so. But now, with the jewel in both their hands, he realized there was no need to ask Gwinthrayle about it; he knew it for certain, and he was filled with unbridled joy--greater than only the day before, when Madeline was recovering from her and the rats' ordeal.

They finished "testing", and Johnathan suddenly held Madeline tightly to him and said excitedly, "Oh, this is too good to be true!"

Madeline replied happily, "Yes, the jewel can send us all home now! We'll soon see our children again."

"Yes, but there's more." Turning to face the others, he said breathlessly, "Friends...remember how Gwinthrayle said we'd both be 'forever changed' by our association with the jewel? Well, I now know how it's changed Madeline. It extended her life! She'll now live as long as I will, and the rest of us who got the injections at NIMH!"

"Johnathan, is this true? Really true?" Madeline asked unbelievingly.

"Yes, really! 'Try' the jewel."

She did so, and after a few more seconds, knew it was indeed so. And again, the two mice embraced, and both again found themselves unable to speak. Everyone was overjoyed at the news. Congratulations filled the air, and Johnathan noticed that even Gwinthrayle appeared surprised.

And now, everyone knew, it was truly time to leave, though there was a certain amount of reluctance on everyone's part, especially on Johnathan's. "Gwinthrayle, you've been as good a friend as any I've ever had, maybe better. I'll never forget you."

"None of us will, Gwinthrayle," added Justin. "You saved all our lives, and we'll always be grateful."

"It's always been my duty and pleasure to help others in need, Justin. There's no debt between me and all of you. And, in any case, this doesn't have to be a final farewell. With the jewel in your possession, Johnathan and Madeline, you could come here anytime."

"I hadn't thought about that," said Madeline.

"Nor had I," said Johnathan, "but I do wish you could tell us more about this 'chosen' business. It's a little...unsettling, in spite of all the good the jewel's done us."

"Believe me, I've told all that I know. Now, please, all of you have your own lives to resume."

And soon, all the not-necessarily-final farewells were concluded, and the five had all joined hands and were concentrating. Once more, the jewel became radiant, and the now-familiar red glow again enveloped them, until, with an abrupt flash, Gwinthrayle found himself alone in his garden.

Mr. Ages heard a knock on the door. "Come in," he said somewhat wearily.

Orson walked in. "No sign of them yet?"

"You'd know as well as I if there were," Ages replied irritably from behind Justin's desk, the strain of worrying and waiting clearly telling on him.

"Okay, I can see. There's no need to snap," Orson replied, not as used to Ages' occasional periods of curtness as some of the other Rats.

"Yes, yes, I know, I'm sorry. It's just that it's been almost four days, and we--and they--had absolutely no idea what they were getting into, where they were going." Ages got up and commenced pacing the floor. "All they had to go on was that image of Johnathan that Mrs. Brisby saw in the amulet."

"But the jewel did take them somewhere, and that just goes to show that Johnathan probably had the same thing happen to him."

"Yes, I've been telling myself that all along, but--"

It came so suddenly, this near-blinding flash, that Ages and Orson felt physically knocked off their feet. When it faded, their eyes widened. Four--no, five figures, looking somewhat dazed and weakened, were standing in the middle of the room. They all looked around, blinking, looking disoriented... but only for a brief moment.

"Johnathan, we made it! We're home! You're home!" one cried ecstatically, as she and another hugged each other tightly.

Orson and Ages stared. "Johnathan?" they both asked each other as it sank in what had just taken place, as the five newcomers congratulated each other with hugs and backpats. Soon Orson and Ages joined them.

"You're back! You're really back! And Johnathan! We were right all along! You're still alive!" Mr. Ages exclaimed,almost babbling as both Johnathan and Madeline greeted him.

"You old walrus! It's good to see you again," Johnathan replied. "Have we got a story for you!" He then thought for a moment, and said to Justin, "Perhaps it would be best told to everyone at once."

Justin agreed, but had reservations. "I wonder if it would be wise to give everyone the full details, what with the powers that we know the jewel is capable of."

Johnathan considered this point, then said, " I don't see why not; from what you told me before, everyone knows about its power. But first...I want to see our children again. They should be told first. If one of you could..." he started, but Mr. Ages was already heading out the door.

A few minutes later he returned. The door burst open ahead of him, and in rushed Teresa, Martin, Cynthia and Timothy, their eyes widening as they saw their mother. They ran to her, and it was clear that all of them, including Martin (who usually avoided such emotional displays), had been quite worried, for they were all crying with relief over her safety as they gathered around. She found she couldn't keep herself from crying either.

In a few minutes, after the children greeted Justin and the others, Martin asked her, "But where did you go, Mom?" The other children were also suddenly intensely curious, raising a chorus of whys and hows as well as wheres.

She gently silenced them and said, "There's a lot to tell, and we've brought...someone to help us tell it. Someone we all know and love, who we all thought was gone from us forever." They all asked who.

Johnathan, in the adjoining chamber, recognized his cue. He had wanted so much to come right out and be reunited with them as they came through the door, but knew it was best to wait until after they'd seen their mother again.

And now in answer to their question, they heard a voice say, "Hello, children. I've...come back."

They all turned at the sound of the familiar voice, and their jaws went slack. For a moment, all were silent.

Then Johnathan said, "Teresa, Martin, Cynthia, Timothy...it's really me. It's your father."

Timothy was the first to run forward and leap into his father's arms. His sisters and brother soon followed.

And their mother realized that her earlier anxieties about how the children would handle their father's return were for naught.

And then, to everyone's surprise, Timothy said, as he sat on his father's lap, "I knew you'd come back, Daddy. I always knew."

Johnathan threw a surprised look at Madeline, which she returned with one that told him that this would definitely warrant further discussion later. For now, though, the children (and Mr. Ages and Orson) would be told the full story of how their father survived, and their mother's and the rats' adventures in searching for him.

The children listened attentively, with anxiety as Johnathan described his narrow escape from Dragon, with wonder as they all described the sights and sounds of Gwinthrayle's world, with trepidation as they described their entrapment by Ghormfisk. It was a story long in telling, but no one, including Justin, Arthur or Willis, minded taking part.

"Well," said Justin as they finished, "I guess now we can tell everyone else." He had Orson and Mr. Ages initiate spreading the word that a general meeting (meaning everyone invited) in the council chamber was imminent. Soon everyone was gathered, and Justin led everyone in his office through his private passageway leading from his chambers directly to the council chamber.

Outside of the council, it was generally known that Justin, Arthur, Willis and Mrs. Brisby had gone someplace, though many claimed that nobody actually saw them leave (which was true, of course). Now, before the general populace, Justin reiterated what he'd told the council before they left, and added, to everyone's amazement, that they were successful. There was a curious and slightly confused murmur running through the crowd, but before Justin could explain further, Martin, seated with Mrs. Brisby and his siblings, shouted out proudly, "My Dad's back!"

Justin put a hand up to his face as if in embarrassment, but was snickering to himself; after all, he had certainly felt like doing much the same thing. "Thank you, Martin," he said grinning. "Friends...it's true. Our old friend and comrade Johnathan is alive and well." Johnathan stepped forward from behind a curtain into everyone's full view. After the initial excitement had died down, the friends took turns,as before for the children, telling the full story to everyone assembled. When they finished, Justin reflected on all that had been accomplished. He remembered how he'd thought himself such a failure after they'd been trapped by Ghormfisk, but now he'd never felt more positive about his role as leader. He remembered, too, how he'd thought Ghormfisk no different from Jenner, and finding out differently. Things would no longer be as simple for him, he decided, but he knew he'd be better able to deal with them.

And now, a proper celebration was being quickly but elaborately prepared, with a great banquet, all in honor of Johnathan and those who brought him back. Johnathan was much less reluctant to bask in the adulation of the masses than Madeline, who still felt uncomfortable with all the attention.

Amidst it all, Justin finally caught up with Isabella in one of the corridors. She was slightly surprised that Justin purposely sought her out. "I've been meaning to catch up with you, but haven't had much time since we got back," he told her, putting an arm around her shoulders. "There's...some things I've wanted to discuss with you."

"Well, you..I mean...yes, of course, Justin," she replied, almost beside herself with the attention he was suddenly showing her. They walked off together.

The celebration lasted well into the night. Johnathan was given a tour

of the new colony, as his family had before, and he too was highly impressed with their accomplishments. Afterward, they gladly accepted Justin's offer to spend the night in the guest quarters, since they didn't want to start the journey home at night, and since it was raining outside.

In the morning, the Brisby family and Mr. Ages gathered outside the main entrance. Seeing them off were Justin, Isabella, Arthur, Willis, Brutus, and Orson. As Johnathan got his first look at the outside since his return, he paused and silently surveyed the area--taking in the sky, grass, trees, the pond, the sun only starting to show above the cliffs encircling the valley--as if seeing it all for the first time. Discarding any trace of dignity, he leaped into the air and gave an inarticulate yell of unrestrained joy. Cynthia asked him what the matter was, and he hugged her to him and said that there was nothing at all wrong, that it was just so great to be back. Now came more goodbyes, though these were certainly not final ones.

"Johnathan..Madeline...you and the children are always welcome here," Justin said, "as if I had to mention it."

"And our door will be always be open to you, too," said Johnathan.

"Do us a favor, though, okay?" said Willis. "Next time you decide to go on a vacation, make it someplace closer!"

"Sure, as long as I don't have to look at you guys' ugly faces!" retorted Johnathan. The two hugged and thwacked each other's back. Even Justin found himself smiling, pleased that even he himself could find humor in their ordeal.

Mr. Ages said, "Justin, I wish I could have done more than just maintain a vigil for your return."

"Nonsense. Orson tells me you never once gave up hope, you always held out for our return. That's a lot more than I would've given you credit for." They shook hands and Justin gave Ages a backpat and said with a grin, "Now go on home, you old goat!" Ages gave only a token grumble and was grinning himself.

Isabella and the children said goodbye to each other, and Madeline thanked her once more for helping to look after them. And soon, after exchanging final (for now) farewells, the seven mice began the journey home.

"Justin and Isabella seem quite taken with each other all of a sudden," remarked Madeline after they'd walked a short ways. "I hope they'll be happy together."

Johnathan agreed. "I know he certainly deserves that kind of happiness."

"Oh, yuck," put in Martin.

As they continued walking, Madeline and the children (especially Martin, with great enthusiasm) described in greater detail their flight in, courtesy of Jeremy and Beatrice, and Ages told more of the crow who brought him here, who was named Regina, and their own journey here. Madeline then suggested, "Couldn't the jewel transport us home?"

"I'd thought about that," said Johnathan (glancing over his shoulder at the small bundle he'd brought from his "exile", within which he'd stashed the jewel), "but wouldn't you agree that we've both had enough of it and its power for awhile? I think we should just let it 'sleep' for a time. Plus, there are a lot of sights that I've missed that I'd like to take in again. Of course, we could still use it in an emergency."

Madeline thought about these points and agreed that they made sense. She'd become so accustomed to all the strangeness these past few days, to the point where "coming down" would take a little get-

ting used to. Then something else occurred to her. "Since we're going to the summer home, we'd have to explain our sudden presence to our neighbors if we used the jewel." She and Johnathan agreed that it would be best to keep its power and existence a secret to most, to the greatest extent possible, and told the children to comply.

Martin then brought up a point his mother had almost forgotten. "Say, Mom, remember how Jeremy and Beatrice said they might give us a lift back?"

"Yes, I remember now," she replied, which in turn prompted her to ask Mr. Ages if he was expecting "his" crow, Regina, to show up. Just then Johnathan pointed towards some upcoming treetops. They all looked and saw two--no, three birds approaching, and as they did it was obvious they were crows. Madeline and the children immediately recognized Jeremy and Beatrice, and Mr. Ages recognized Regina. Presently all three recognized their mouse friends and prepared to land. After doing so, they greeted each other, Madeline complimenting Jeremy and Beatrice on their smoother-than-usual landing. The necessary introductions were made, and when Jeremy, who'd known that Mrs. Brisby had lived alone with her children, asked where Johnathan had been all this time, he and Madeline just replied that unforeseen circumstances had forced him away, but that now he was back for good.

Johnathan readily agreed that flying home was a splendid idea: "I've done and seen a lot of things, but flying's a new wrinkle. Let's get started!" After further negotiation, Regina agreed to help share the total "load", and soon all were ready: Johnathan, Cynthia, and Timothy would ride with Jeremy; Madeline and Martin with Beatrice; and Mr. Ages and Teresa with Regina.

Soon, all were airborne, and again the children yelled with the thrill of it all. For Johnathan, it was as much a thrill, or perhaps greater, and his elation at being reunited with his family and home was greatly enhanced. For Madeline, her feelings were much the same, and now it seemed that some words she'd once heard, from where she couldn't say, were coming to her: "And love is still the key; And love, it seems, made flying dreams/ To bring you home to me."[7]

Epilogue

Beneath the roots of a giant oak, near a brook, Johnathan and Madeline Brisby had just put the children to bed, and were preparing to do the same.

Earlier, when they'd arrived, around noon, those neighbors who'd known Johnathan were naturally very surprised to see him. He and Madeline just explained that she just happened to find him alive and well on her trip, and let it go at that.

"It's going to take some getting used to, having the sun setting so early," Johnathan now remarked, "but it'll be worth it. There's something similar that happens to humans; jet lag, I think

---

7. This, of course, is taken from "Flying Dreams", Jerry Goldsmith's and Paul Williams' title song from the film. After I'd worked out many of my own plot details, I'd realized that its lyrics were quite appropriate for aspects of my own story, much more than for the film, and I wanted to work in an excerpt from it into my own story.

it's called."

Madeline said, "That's right, the days on Gwinthrayle's world are longer." After a pause she added, "I wonder how he's doing."

"I admit I almost felt like I'd left him in a lurch, after all he'd done for me...for all of us. But then, we still have the jewel, so we could pop in anytime." He paused, all at once lost in thought.

"You're thinking about that talk of his, about being 'chosen', aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. It hasn't been an obsession, but my mind keeps coming back to it. It makes it sound like we're just puppets to the whims of someone we've never seen and perhaps never will. Still...the jewel has done us more good than harm, at least when it's been in our hands; and it's brought us together again...in ways neither of us thought possible." They embraced, once again filled with emotion over the knowledge that they would now have many more years together than they'd thought.

After a few minutes, they discussed Ghormfisk for a while, then Madeline suggested, "When we do visit Gwinthrayle again, do you think it would be safe enough to take the children with us? They're all very curious to see where I was for three--no, four days, and you for a year and a half."

"I don't see why not. It's certainly safe enough. But that decision can certainly wait; we've got all the time in the world."

"Yes," Madeline agreed wistfully. They walked over to the children's beds, and as they watched them slip into slumber, another thought came to her. "I wonder how Timothy seems to know so much," she whispered to Johnathan, "saying that he'd always known you'd return, and all."

"He is quite the enigmatic little guy, isn't he? Well, who knows? Maybe we'll find that out too, someday." They walked back over to their own bed.

"The first night together, in our own home again," Madeline said dreamily. "Just a few days ago, I'd never have believed it." As they settled into bed, they thought about the many mysteries they were still faced with, the things they still didn't know. But there was no trace of anxiety or worry; for tomorrow was another day, the first of many they'd spend together, and together they'd face anything that came along.

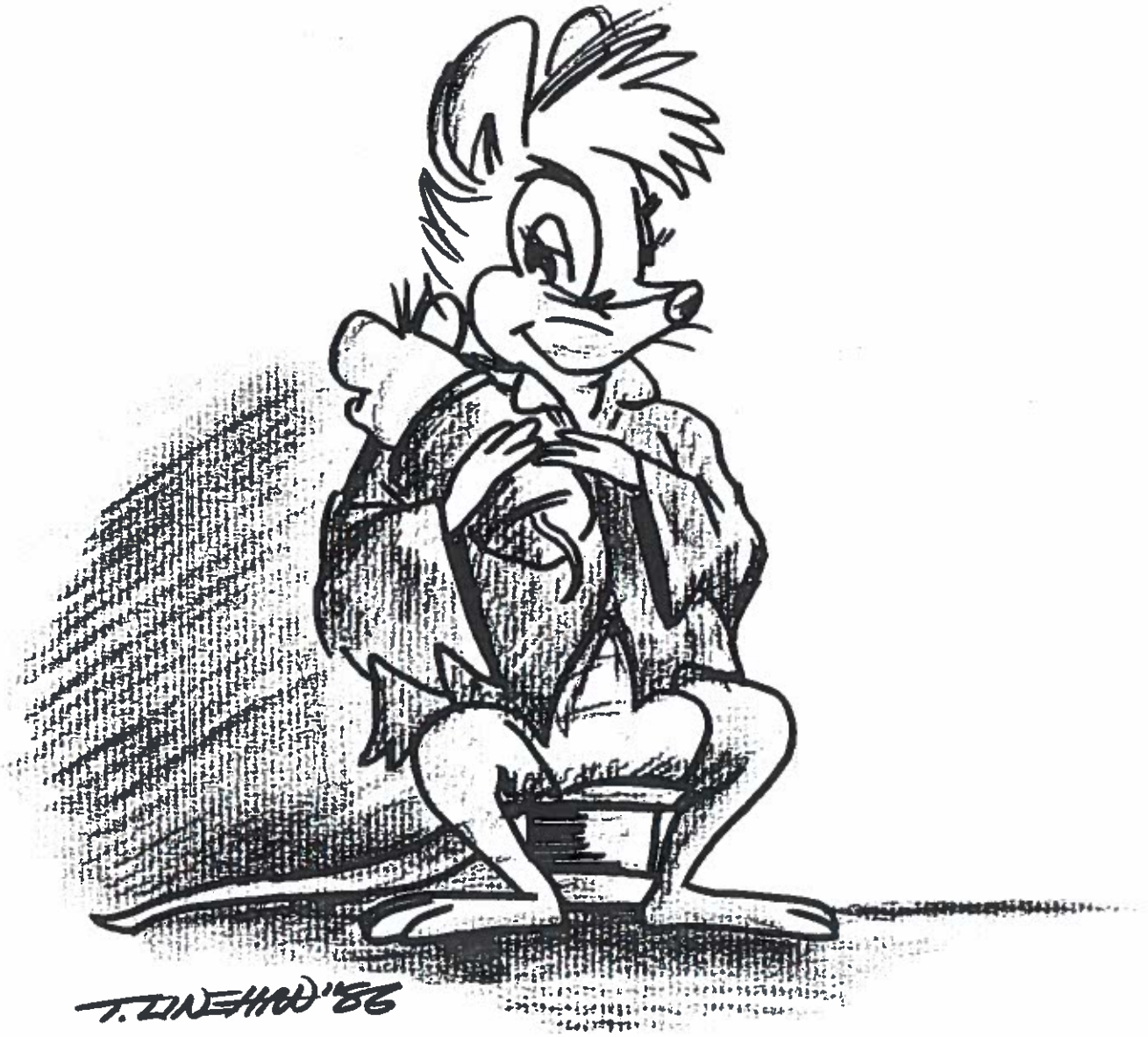
"I love you, Johnathan," she murmured.

"And I love you." They drifted into sleep.

And inside a small, hinged box, the red amulet also slept... for now.

THE END

I'VE JUST RECEIVED AN INVITATION IN THE MAIL...
"YOUR PRESENCE REQUESTED... THIS EVENING... IT'S FORMAL...
IN TOP HAT...
AND.... TAILS?
AND WHITE TIE...


T. ONEIL '86

THE STONE

The stream shone gold in the afternoon sunlight. Bumblebees buzzed around the thistle flowers. A grey mouse searched for something at the base of a reed. Taking a small sword and scabbard from their hiding place, he deftly strapped them to his belt.

He looked back at the old oak near the stream. There, awaiting his return, was the future Mrs. Brisby. Jonathan, you are the luckiest mouse in the world, he thought and smiled. Not since his escape from the labs of NIMH had he felt so elated. The company of his friends the rats had not been nearly so beguiling as her simple charm; He then remembered Nicodemus waited for him also, back in the haven of the rats of NIMH.

Jonathan ran swiftly through the tall grass, leaving the stream behind. Rabbits cropping the grass paid him no mind, save the occasional sniff. The elongated shadow of the old mill hid the entrance to the rats' waterway.

The stone stairs leading down were slippery with algae. Jonathan descended slowly, but nearly fell when a large rat surprised him at the bend. "Justin! What are you doing here? I thought your shift ended hours ago!"

"I figured I'd wait for you. The trip back is boring without company. You're late! Was your lady love delaying you, old rascal?" Justin winked knowingly.

"Well, I guess I am a little late, but today I proposed to her and she accepted! I can't wait to tell the others!"

"Congratulations Jonathan! I know you'll be very happy together. Pity we can't come to your wedding, but we'll celebrate here just the same. Come, the others are waiting. The boat is ready. I'll pole this time, you just sit back and tell me all about your day." Justin led him down to the boat, waited until it steadied, then pushed it from the dock.

Above them, in the old mill, a sinister-looking rat paced back and forth. He stopped to listen intently, then resumed his restless pacing. What could have gone wrong? he thought. Justin should have passed below hours ago! If he had entered through the rosebush all his work and planning had been for naught. His carefully constructed "accident" would have to wait, gathering dust until much later. The pile of rocks and dirt was poised at the proper spot where, with just a nudge, would fall destroying whatever passed below. Then Nicodemus would have no successor to his leadership, he, Jennar, would be rid of an enemy and rival, and the way would be open for him to take control.

A faint noise spurred Jennar into action. He rushed to the gap in the rotting floor and listened, his long whiskers trembling with anticipation. It was Justin alright, and someone else, Jonathan Brisby! Jennar rubbed his paws with glee. With the death of his two closest friends Nicodemus would not dare carry out his foolish plan.

The boat parted the dark waters smoothly. Jennar held the pin that, when pulled, would cascade destruction on his foes.

He removed the pin, sending the rubble tumbling to the boat. Jonathan pushed Justin off the boat moments before impact. A rain of rocks, dirt and debris sank the boat, and Jonathan with it. Justin's head broke the surface, gasping for air.

Above, Jennar ran, his evil laughter echoing in the deserted mill. Now let Nicodemus try and stop him!

Justin dove in the murky water, he had to find Jonathan! Again he dove, trying to feel his way to free his friend. No sign of him.

The water began to glow, a far glow from the depths. Bubbles boiled up, a reddish light emmanating from the water like liquid fire. Jonathan's head broke the surface. Justin quickly grabbed it, pulling him ashore.

The morning dew had already dried from the leaves, bright sunshine reflected from the bottle - the glass window of the house. A small figure could be seen through it.

"What could be keeping Jonathan? Ah Auntie Shrew, do you think something has happened to him?" The young lady mouse stood peering out a window in her home among the roots of the old oak. A large obese shrew sat on a sturdy chair. "I should think not, child. He's probably got a bad case of cold feet! Mind you, I warned you about him. Trying to fill your head with nonsense! Electricity, reading, bah! Almost as bad as that fraud Ages! And now he's stood you up, left you without so much as a goodbye!"

"Oh no, Auntie Shrew! Jonathan truly loves me. I know he'll come soon. Maybe I should go look for him!" The petite beauty ran for the door, but the great bulk of the shrew blocked her way.

"No you don't! If he wants you, let him come to you!"

"But, Auntie Shrew!" A knock on the door interrupted her. "IT'S HIM!" She shouted and struggled to reach the door handle.

In a small bed, Jonathan slept fitfully. A bent and ancient rat sat in quiet vigil next to the bed. It was Nicodemus, leader of the rats. "Jonathan, wake up ... can you hear me, Jonathan?" Nicodemus' voice softly called to him. Jonathan coughed slightly, then rubbed his eyes.

"Nicodemus? What ... Where's Justin?"

"He's here Jonathan. Look beside you." Justin gaped at Jonathan.

"Wha ... what's wrong Justin? Do you feel alright?" Queried Jonathan

"Should I tell him, Nicodemus?" Justin looked with awe at the mouse.

"Look here, in this mirror Jonathan and you will see." Nicodemus floated a mirror from the chest near the bed. Jonathan looked, shrank back and looked again with disgust. "No! Not me! I have become like you Nicodemus, or like Brutus. My eyes, they're glowing. I feel strange.

"A little gift from our tormentors at NIMH. One that they themselves never would have imagined possible. An impurity in the chamicals, perhaps, combined with your individual genetic traits and your mind, that has provided you with the Power. It saved your lifte today." Nicodemus bowed slightly.

"You saved my life too Jonathan. I can never repay you" said Justin.

"Think nothing of it Justin. Nicodemus you know of my marriage plans. How am I going to explain this to her! It's going to keep me from her, I'd rather have died back there! There is a way to be rid of it, is there Nicodemus?"

"The Power is there not by choice Jonathan. But perhaps something can be done. I must study the matter further. Meanwhile, rest Jonathan. Justin will see to your needs." Nicodemus walked out, his long robe trailing.

"You were unconscious for a long time Jonathan. Nicodemus has been at your bedside all day long." Just looked worm.

"You've been here too, I see. You say a day has passed?"

"Yes Jonathan. And I know what you're thinking. Yes' we sent word to your lady fair, with Ages."

"Ages?" Jonathan grinned.

"You know how much he likes to mingle." Justin cast his gaze heavenward. "He was really taken with the idea."

"Taken aback, you mean."

"You should have seen him when he returned! He grabbed a flask of headache potion and downed it in one gulp! Then he spent the rest of the time muttering about a fat harridan of a shrew and being questioned by both her and a tearful young lady until nearly driven mad! Never again he said."

Jonathan laughed. "Poor Ages! You must thank him for me. And now I think you should rest too. I can manage well enough, and you can use some sleep."

"Are you sure you'll be alright? Nicodemus said ..." Justin's voice trailed as he spied a water filled glass floating to Jonathan's had. "I guess it'll be alright. Goodnight Jonathan."

"Goodnight Justin", said Jonathan. But try as he might, he could not rest easy knowing his future might be shattered by this Power, unexpected and unwanted.

It was only at midday that Nicodemus allowed Jonathan to get up from his bed. Mr. Ages' potions and his magic had healed his woulds. Afterwards Justin came to escort him to Micodemus' chambers.

Dusty books sat on row after row of shelves carbed from the rock, a single bulb illuminating the round chamber. The floor was polished to a mirror shine, inlaid decorations in blue amazonite twisted in elegant curves. Jonathan stood in the center, Nicodemus and Justin stood to either side.

"What you say is not very comforting Nicodemus. The method you propose has great risk. Are you sure there is no other way?" Jonathan looked at the ancient rat hopefully.

"The Power may be held in one way only: within a gem's crystalline structure. There is the danger that your life-force may be absorbed too. This is an untried, risky venture. Perhaps she will not object to your change. There's still time to reconsider."

"No! If I should perish Nicodemus, give the gem to her. It was for her that I kept the stone, ever since I found it in the forest. I even engraved a dedication of sorts on the back. Even if I live, the stone will go to her eventually. If I follow your advice she will need help through her winter years. I am ready Nicodemus."

"Very well. Hold the stone high Jonathan, and channel your Power to it. Imagine its center is the one you love. Gather that feeling and release it in that one spot. I will aid you."

Jonathan frowned with concentration. The bulb grew dim. An unexpected wind fanned Nicodemus' robe. A dim glow began within the stone. Nicodemus raised his staff and the glow grew stronger. Jonathan cried out with pain. He let go of the stone, yet the stone remained in place, a floating disk of living fire. He kneeled, assailed with sharp, shooting pains, gasping for breath.

"Jonathan! Hold back!" commanded Nicodemus. Jonathan collapsed. The stone's glow grew dim, then faded to nothing.

"Nicodemus! Is Jonathan dead? Did he fail?" said Justin.

"He lives. The effort was great. As to his success, we will see. Look. Jonathan wakens."

Jonathan looked at his reflection on the floor. A grin appeared on his face. He was his old self again.

Over Nicodemus' objections, Jonathan had stayed to drug Dragon's food. Luckily there were no problems, and now Jonathan readied to return to his love. A full moon shone outside, aiding him in his journey back.

"Keep the stone for me until the time comes, Nicodemus" said Jonathan as he stood ready to return to the surface.

"Gladly, friend. Its power will not fade. If you should need it, it will be here. Now hurry, your love is waiting."

Jonathan Brisby walked hurriedly, the troubles of the past two days vanishing with each step.

Jennar was brooding in his dark chamber, lost in thoughts of hate and death. His plan had failed miserably, even though he had been so meticulous. A knock on his door, then two short raps. Sullivan. "Go away, I'm busy!" yelled Jennar.

"I've got news, Jennar! Let me in!" Sullivan's voice was muffled by the heavy, thick door. Jennar opened the door, then glared at the short, sturdy rat waiting to be let in.

"Don't just stand there, come in!" Jennar pulled the rat inside by his muscular arm.

"I've got good news for you, Jennar, about Justin, Jonathan, and Nicodemus." Sullivan stared about the room uneasily.

"Ah, the Dreamers. It better be good, I am in no mood for foolishness." Jennar crossed his arms, waiting.

"I overheard them near the tunnel. It seems they have a gem with mystical powers. Nicodemus himself guards it."

"Tell me more friend Sullivan, tell me more!" Jennar stroked his bearded chin. That was the reason his plan had failed. What he could do with such power! "I must have that stone!" muttered Jennar, his eyes glinting evilly.

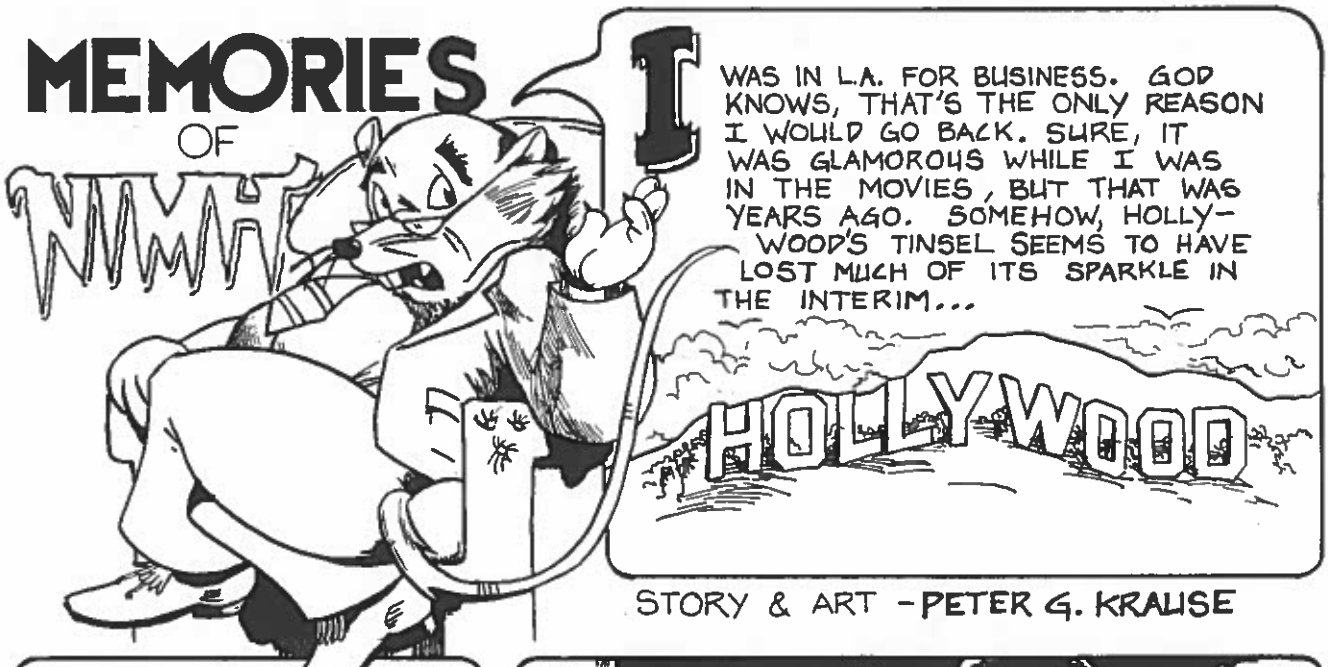
The moon's reflection danced in the water as Jonathan approached the simple home within the roots of the old oak. She was waiting outside, the moonlight turning her fur to silver. "Jonathan! I missed you so!" she said as they embraced. Time stood still for them as the fireflies flickered and swooped above.

THE END

I would like to thank David Lemhuis for his support and information, Michael Paganello for his great help, Steve Gallacci, J.R. Tolkien, A.D. Foster and most of all Tim Fay for making all this possible. Any comments are welcome, whether on this story, Nimh, animation in general, Albedo, etc. Please write to me:

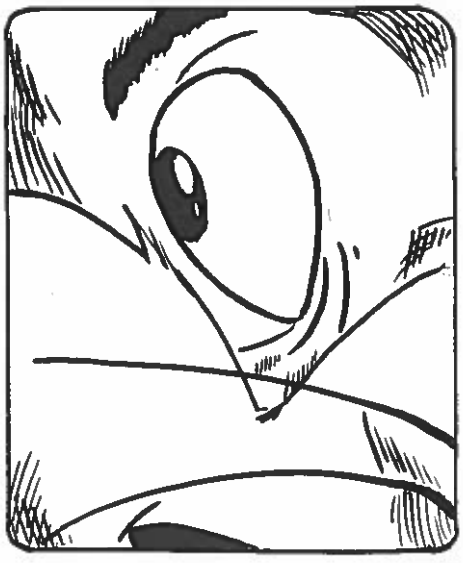
Juan Alfonso
11411 S.W. 42nd Terrace
Miami, FL 33165

MEMORIES OF WMH


I WAS IN L.A. FOR BUSINESS. GOD KNOWS, THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I WOULD GO BACK. SURE, IT WAS GLAMOROUS WHILE I WAS IN THE MOVIES, BUT THAT WAS YEARS AGO. SOMEHOW, HOLLY-WOOD'S TINSEL SEEMS TO HAVE LOST MUCH OF ITS SPARKLE IN THE INTERIM...
HOLLYWOOD

STORY & ART - PETER G. KRAUSE

HOW'D I FIND HIM? PURE COINCIDENCE. AFTER MEETING MY CLIENT, I WAS WALKING AROUND THE 'DOWNTOWN' AREA. IT WAS HOT, I WAS HUNGRY, AND JUST A BIT THIRSTY. I DECIDED TO ENTER ONE OF THE LOCAL TAVERNS.
COMON INN



WE BOTH GOT UP AND MET EACH OTHER HALFWAY. "MAC", HE SAID, REPEATING THE PET NAME HE HAD FOR ME; SHORT, OF COURSE, FOR MACPHERSON...

OR, SHOULD I SAY, *SULLIVAN*?

YES, IT WAS *FLYNN EARLING*, THE DASHING *JUSTIN* OF "NIMH". BUT NOW HE JUST LOOKED DASHED, DISHEVELED — HIS FACE AND BODY GAUNT AND DRAWN.

THE SHOCK OF HIS CONDITION SHOWN IN MY EYES. I WAS ABOUT TO SPEAK, BUT HE CUT ME OFF. "I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING," HE SAID "HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? LET'S SIT DOWN. I CAN TELL YOU THE WHOLE STORY!"

AS HE BEGAN, MY MIND ROLLED BACK TO THE MAKING OF "NIMH". THOSE WERE HEADY DAYS. IMAGINE RATS BEING PORTRAYED IN A FAVORABLE LIGHT! WOULDN'T THIS CHANGE THE HUMANS' PERCEPTION OF US? WOULDN'T THIS MEAN THE END OF THE HOUNDING AND THE AWFUL EXPERIMENTS?

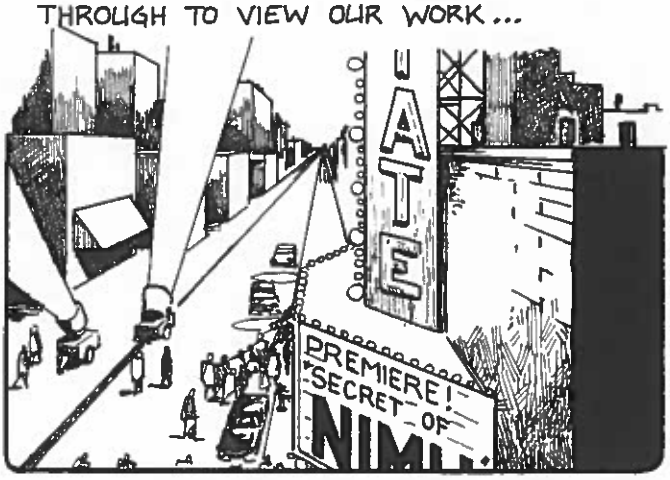
WE ALL SAW FLYNN AS OUR ACE IN THIS REGARD. GRACIOUS, GRACEFUL, AND A MASTERFUL TALENT, HE FILLED UP THE SCREEN. WHO COULDN'T — WHO WOULDN'T — BE SWEPT AWAY BY HIM, AND BE CONVINCED OF THE GOODNESS OF OUR RACE?

UNFORTUNATELY, REALITY HAS A WAY OF SWATTING YOU DOWN WHEN YOU'RE FLYING YOUR HIGHEST. FIRST, THERE WAS TENSION ON THE SET AS FLYNN BEGAN MAKING ADVANCES ON *HEATHER CLAYBURGH*, THE ACTRESS WHO PLAYED *MRS. BRISBY*...

...HEATHER SPURNED HIS OFFERS, WHICH MYSTIFIED AND ANGERED FLYNN. HE BEGAN SHOWING UP LATE FOR FILMING, WITH BOOZE ON HIS BREATH AND WOMEN ON HIS ARMS. IT WAS ALL PART OF A CRAZY SCHEME TO MAKE HEATHER JEALOUS. NEEDLESS TO SAY, IT DIDN'T WORK.

ALL THESE THINGS FLYNN RECALLED, INCLUDING HIS WEAKNESSES FOR LIQUOR AND LADIES. "AND THEN", HE SAID, "THE *MOVIE* CAME OUT." HIS EYES BRIGHTENED WITH THE MEMORY, AND I IMAGINE MINE DID, TOO.

"NIMH" WAS MAGNIFICENT, AND WE WERE HAPPY TO HAVE OUR NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH IT. THE CRITICS RAVED, AND WE STOOD BACK TO LET THE THRONGS THROUGH TO VIEW OUR WORK...



IT NEVER HAPPENED. OH SURE, MANY PEOPLE SAW OUR FILM, BUT "NIMH" NEVER GOT THE NUMBERS IT DESERVED. THAT PRECIPITATED THE FIRST DISASTER; THE STUDIO — BANKING HEAVILY ON OUR SUCCESS — WENT BANKRUPT.

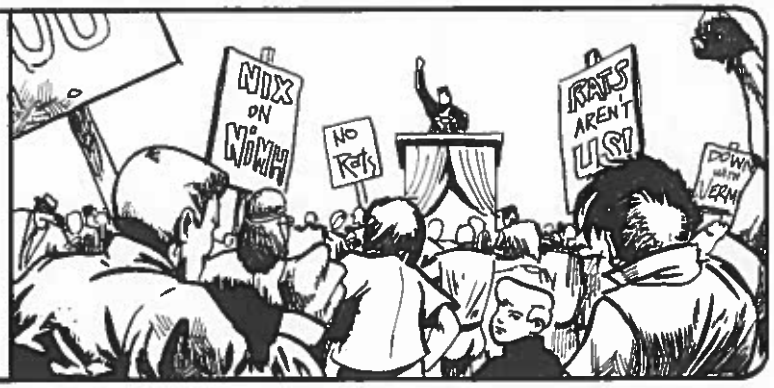
FOR MOST OF US, THE CLOSING OF THE STUDIO MEANT THE END OF STEADY ACTING WORK. WE FELL TO WHATEVER EMPLOYMENT WE COULD FIND: WAITING ON TABLES, PUMPING GAS.

I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKIER ONES. I BEGAN WORKING FOR MY BROTHER'S REAL ESTATE FIRM NORTH OF THE CITY.

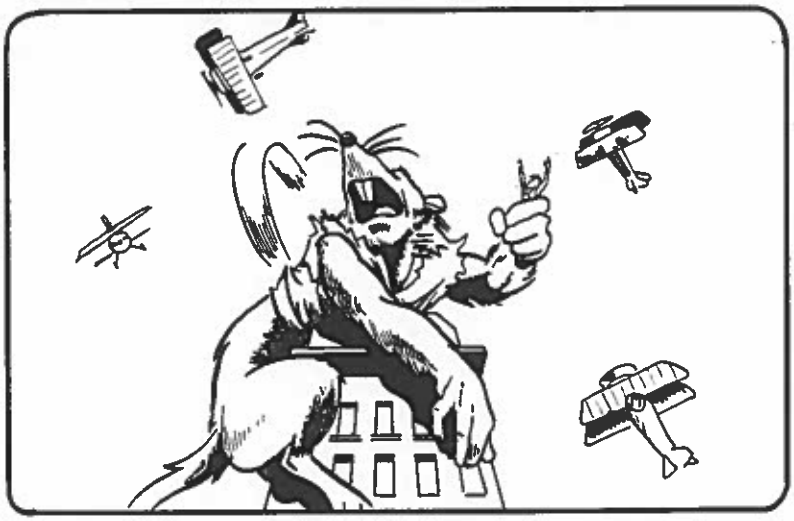
AND FLYNN? WHAT OF HIM?

I HUNG IN THERE. YOU SEE, MAC, THIS WAS MY ONE REAL DREAM — TO BECOME A BIG STAR. NOW THAT I WAS SO CLOSE, I COULDN'T LET GO!
I WAS FINALLY SET TO SIGN A MULTI-FILM DEAL WITH DESIGNER STUDIOS, WHEN THE *PLAGUE* HIT!

AH, YES. THE PLAGUE OF '86. IT DEVASTATED MANY HUMAN COMMUNITIES, KILLING HUNDREDS AS FAR NORTH AS SAN FRANCISCO. ONE RESEARCHER LINKED THE DISEASE TO RATS, AND ALTHOUGH IT WAS NEVER PROVEN, OUR SPECIES WAS SUDDENLY WORSE OFF THAN EVER. EVERY CHEAP POLITICIAN AND EVANGELIST IN THE STATE JUMPED ON THE ANTI-RAT BANDWAGON.



ALTHOUGH MY BROTHER AND I HELD ON DESPITE A PROLONGED SLUMP IN HOUSING SALES – IT WAS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND RESIDENCES THAT WOULD BE SPARED FROM THE EXTERMINATOR'S HAND- THE PLAGUE CRUSHED FLYNN'S HOPES AND THEN HIS LIFE. DESIGNER STUDIOS DROPPED HIM BEFORE HE COULD SIGN, AND INSTEAD PUSHED THEIR MOUSE STARS TO THE FORE. DESPERATE FOR ANY FILM WORK, FLYNN BEGAN TO APPEAR IN CHEAP RAT-HORROR FILMS - A PREDICTABLE HUMAN REACTION TO THE DISEASE. BUT HIS FLAME WAS GONE, HIS PRIDE VANQUISHED. FLYNN WAS GROPING, AND SOON HE COULDN'T EVEN GET ROLES IN THOSE AWFUL FILMS. FLYNN HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE BOTTLE.



...BUT THE WORST TIMES HAVE PASSED, MAL. I'VE HIRED A NEW AGENT - A GOOD ONE. HAS AN ODD NAME, THOUGH. GOES BY THE HANDLE OF *SEMINOLE SAM*. HE'S CONTACTING THE STUDIOS, SAYS THERE'S SOME INTEREST. I FEEL A BREAK COMING ANY DAY!

FLYNN TOOK ANOTHER DEEP GULP OF HIS DRINK.

DREAMS CAN DIE HARD, ESPECIALLY IN THIS TOWN WHEN YOU HAVE COME SO NEAR THE TOP. I MUMBLED SOMETHING ABOUT GETTING BACK TO THE HOTEL, AND FLYNN NODDED, UNDERSTANDING. REACHING INTO MY POCKET, I FISHED OUT A TWENTY AND FORCED IT ON FLYNN. HE DIDN'T PUT UP MUCH OF A FIGHT.

AS I WALKED TO THE DOOR, I LOOKED BACK. "SEE YA LATER," FLYNN SAID. AS I REMEMBER...

..IT WAS STILL HOT OUTSIDE. I SEEMED TO BE THIRSTIER THAN EVER.

END

6-86

Emulator

Baily called my attention to the cats behind the restaurant. There were nine of them all together, from a pair of half grown kittens to a big orange tom. Naturally, the one we were after wasn't there. No huge gray neutered male with white muzzle, paws, and a white patch on his chest.

"Feeding strays," growled Baily as he clumped up Seafood Shack's steps. "Dammit, when I get the chance, I'm gonna call the Board of Health and complain. Yeah, and the pound as well."

Baily had been the one to find Rudwin after 343-A's escape. The sight of the doctor's face had affected him badly.He'd developed an obsessive hatred of cats.

"Easy, Baily," I said. "We're not supposed to draw attention to our--selves or create disturbances. We're just supposed to be looking for the damn cat."

"Oh yeah," he said sarcastically. "I'm not supposed to raise a stink when I see a restaurant fostering worthless, unsanitary little parasites. I'm supposed to behave calmly when there's a thing as dangerous as Frankenstein's Monster on the loose. God only knows what its done since it got loose..."

"Look, if 343-A did anything outrageous, we'd know about it already. It'd be in the papers if super intelligent cat started talking to people or was seen driving a car. Besides, he's nowhere near the danger to the public those rats are. He's a fixed male, remember, he can't pass it on to his young..."

"And you!" snapped Baily. "Unless you start taking this assignment ser--iously you're gonna find yourself on report when we get back to the In--stitute."

I bit back my anger. Baily and I were supposedly equal partners, not officer and subordinate, but I knew he would report me if I rubbed him the wrong way. And lie on it, as well. The Institute was having its troubles, a lot of heads would be on the block, Baily's and mine included, if it got out what we'd been doing to animals...let alone that a number of "potential Frankensteins" had escaped. The pressure was making Baily bad tempered, and frankly, vicious.

Still, his arrogant, steamroller methods did get things done. I wondered if it was just an idea in my head that someday his less than ethical (or legal) way of doing things would land us both in trouble.

He got away with it this time. He flashed his badge at the girl at the Seafood Shack's cash register.

"National Institute of Mental Health. We want to speak with the manager and staff," he said curtly.

As usual, the girl took the badge to mean he had the same authority and power that a policeman or F.B.I. agent would have. Therefore, during a busy lunch hour Baily had all the waitresses, cooks and the manager of the restu--rant assembled in the kitchen.

"We represent the National Institute of Mental Health," he began. "About two years ago, a valuable laboratory animal escaped from on of our laboratories. The creature was a cat, a very large fixed male. It looks like, I suppose, just a large alley cat, but experiments have been done with it to the point the creature is carrying around a hundred thousand dollars worth of special drugs and equipment inside it."

I saw the scowls. I think some of the people would have been less upset if Baily had broken the rules and said the animal was dangerous. Spend a hundred thousand taxpayer's dollars on a pussycat and then lose him? What were those government people thinking about?

"Anyhow, the animal is very distinctive," my partner went on. "A big gray tabby, white muzzle, chest, and paws. Very big cat. The toes on the front paws are very elongated, almost fingers. That's one of the reasons it was selected for the experiments, we wanted to see if it could manipulate with those paws like they were hands.

"Now has anybody seen an animal like that? Behind this restaurant? Any place?"

The manager, a dignified middle aged man in a business suit, mentioned: "I've seen a big gray and white cat like you've described several times. Only I can't say whether he has handlike paws."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Look mister, I don't make a hobby of looking at cat's toes."

"I've seen the cat too," put in a chef.

Most of the staff had noticed an unusually large gray cat at one time or another.

"And...now I have to ask this, think carefully. Have any of you noticed any odd behavior on the part of this cat at any time? It's very important."

No one could remember anything really unusual about the cat's actions.

"He's very shy," mentioned on waitress. "Runs if you come near him. But lots of alley cats act that way."

"And you've noticed nothing else strange about him? Come on, think! Probe your minds! Produce!"

When they couldn't come up with any evidence that this was the animal we were after, he got nasty.

"You wouldn't want a whole lot of visits from the Board of Health or the Fire Department, would you? Now think and tell me what I want to know!"

That was too much for the manager.

"Look," he sputtered. "You come in and disrupt this place at lunch hour, you threaten us because we can't tell you where your blasted cat is...if you don't get out of here, I'm gonna call your place and make a complaint against you!"

"You mean," said Baily. "That you're refusing to help a government agency recover a valuable specimen?"

"If you want that cat so bad, go back behind our garbage cans and look for him yourself!"

I saw the smouldering look in Baily's eyes. I grabbed the bigger man by the arm and managed to drag him out of the restaurant before he knew what was happening.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded. "Those people..."

"Were completely within their rights," I snapped. "We aren't police, you idiot! We don't have that kind of authority. Not to mention what will happen if they call the Institute and complain you were abusive."

Baily shook himself loose from me.

"Goddamit, Richardson, this is too important to stick by petty rules and regulations! That cat's a monster. If you'd seen Rudwin's face..."

"Anyhow, the guy's right. We should look around for him ourselves. Come on. We might get lucky."

Still simmering, Baily followed me behind the Seafood Shack. I knew the threatened report was only a matter of time now, but I thought I should

try to get my job done before he made it.

No sign of 343-A. The cats there must've sensed Baily's hatred, they all took off when they spotted him. Myself...well, I used to like cats. Used to. I'd forced myself to stop regarding them as graceful, beautiful animals, as fine pets, when the intelligence boosting experiments started. I saw too many cats die horribly from the formulas we used, before we got the doses right. I saw too many vivisected. And I saw a few killed cruelly and needlessly by Rudwin and a couple others. There's folks like that in any lab that uses animals, Rudwin and one of his cronies were the ones too necessary to fire. It was get callous or quit.

Baily acted like it was a personal offense that the cats ran away before he could start kicking them.

"They had no right to give that serum to a cat!" he ranted. "They've got too much intelligence for our good as it is!"

He slapped his hip, which got me nervous. Baily and I both wore guns under our coats, state-of-the-arts tranquilizer guns capable of fireing seven darts without reloading. We had licenses, but I wasn't too keen on his ad--vertising the weapons.

"Instead of raving like you're a right winger and the cats are all red," I muttered, "give me a hand looking for 343-A."

We walked around the bins, probed through the high weeds behind the diner...nothing. Normal felines fled from us, leaving behind stinking fisheads they'd be worrying. We were strangers in a cat colony, a place where cats ate the food humans provided, but lived their own lives, fighting and mating as they saw fit.

"We've got to keep looking," muttered Baily.

I was all for staying here as long as possible. I had no desire to go to the next stop, and have Baily get another manager's back up as high as any cat's. For all I know, the manager might have already called the other rest--urants and warned them about the man from the Mental Health Institute who acted like he was an escaped inmate of the place.

Suddenly Baily grabbed my arm with a jerk than nearly took it out of its socket. Not speaking, he pointed. There was a look of mixed horror and rage on his face.

It was a pair of cats, an orange tom and a calico female. They were standing around an old newspaper, as if they were reading it. That was no--thing unusual, cats often look like they're reading whatever book or paper they're lying on.

But these two were holding the paper up in paws with lengthened toes, paws that had developed into hands.

They were too absorbed in their paper to notice us, until Baily drew his gun and started firing. His first shot caught the male in the flank. His second just missed the female. Than he fired another dose into the male, who was limping away groggily. One dart had enough juice in it to knock out a cat in less than a minute. Two would put the cat out permanently.

"Hey, there was no reason for that," I yelped. "You had him. He might of been of value alive."

"Yeah," said Baily, "and alive maybe he'd rip somebody's head open the way 343-A did. You idiot, don't you realize what those cats mean? That damned monster has figured out how to transform other cats into thinking beasts like him! Can't you see what that means? Cats with intelligence, with manipulatory limbs? One was dangerous. How a bout a dozen? Or a hundred? Or a thousand or a million? Those changes are genetic, you fool, any cat

that's been innocculated will pass this onto its young! They'll be born able to read and understand English, able to use their hands!

"Can't you see what a danger this is to humans? These creatures breed the way we can't. They mature more quickly, even with the age retarding side effect the treatment has. In a few generations the goddamned cats could wipe us out!"

"Even so, we have to catch that female alive. She'd be invaluable for research at the Institute."

"Are you out of your f—ing mind? We gotta round up every goddam cat in the area and kill them. The strays, the pets, everything. God knows how far that monster has spread his condition!"

"I'd still like to know how he does it."

"Yeah? Why don't you ask him? By now he can probably talk. Alright, him we won't kill...he's too valuable. We'll take him back to the lab, wring the truth out of him, then dissect him!"

"Baily, you're disgusting. You sound like Hitler raving about the Jews!"

"Well this thing has to be stopped! Nipped in the bud! If Hitler's methods is what it takes-look!"

He was out of range...just. Even at a distance, old 343-A was recognize -able. Oh, we couldn't make out the fingers, but the large size, and the gray and white pattern were plain in view.

Also the fact that that cat was mad! Mad as hell! I could tell by the tensed way he held his body, I could see the glint of anger in his eyes even at a distance. He'd been a very intelligent cat even before we gave him the serum, now he was smart enough to know we'd killed his friend. Or creat- -ion. Or maybe his son.

Baily, (of course) fired a shot at him. Missed easily.

The cat gave a single hideous scream, and disappeared in the undergrowth as Baily charged him.

"We've got to find the bastard!" raved Baily. "We have to hunt him down and destroy him like we would a rat with bubonic plague! We have to stop this menace before..."

I didn't bother to listen to Baily's ranting. I was still too disturbed by the fact that what the cat had screamed had not been a meaningless yowl of cat rage. The cat who had been 343-A had clearly called us "scum", in clear English.

* * * *

"No one's around," I whispered. "Now we can get in."

Unlike the last house we'd raided, this one had a crummy, easily- -forced lock. Then again, unlike the last one, this one had no furniture in it, at least any that could be seen from the door.

It had been a grueling two days since we'd seen our quarry. After comb- -ing the woods and behind the restaurants, and even a few yards, Baily got the idea the cat might be holed up in one of the several deserted houses in that town. It was an off chance, but we had to take it. Much as I dislike Baily's attitude towards the cats, he was right about having to put a stop to 343-A's smart cat factory. A cat with human brains might not be an actual menace, but a batch of them would be a terrible nuisance, like rabbits in a farm area.

Also, I wanted to know how the devil he was doing it. We believed that since the serum imprinted intelligence, knowledge and longevity on the sub-

-ject's chromosomes, these traits could be passed on, acquired or not. But 343-A was fixed. He could have sex, (contrary to popular belief, gelding does not stop the urge) but not offspring. I could not believe he'd figured out how to brew the serum from scratch. It had taken a half dozen trained scientists to develop it, and as many people and a week's painstaking work just to make a batch.

At first glance, and even second and third, there was nothing worth looking at in the house. Baily complained he smelled cat, and once or twice I thought I'd caught a whiff of a strong feline odor myself. Like I said, the rooms were empty, most of the fixtures, and even a couple of doors, had been removed.

But there was something odd. The room that must have been the dining room of the house was blocked off. Three doorways leading into it, and all of them sealed pretty thoroughly, two with locked doors, one with a clumsily screwed-on board of plywood. Though soundly fixed, the work was strangely sloppy. Sort of what a cat might produce if he tried his hardest to board up a door, he had strength, but not the size or mass to do the job with any competence. Or the really coordinated human hands. Those elongated toes may have worked, but I doubted they had the flexibility of a man's fin--gers.

Once we thought about that, nothing would do but to bust that room, no matter what. It wasn't that easy. The doors were more than locked, they were nailed shut from the inside. It took both of us some time to break the door down.

The room was...an experience. Baily found it a horror, but I couldn't help be fascinated. Science fiction writers have speculated what the place where a non-human being lived in might be like. I saw first hand.

The normal entrance ways had been nailed shut, instead there were two slanting posts leading to trapdoors in the roof. Perfect entrance/exit for an energetic cat. Believe it or not, the place was lighted. There was a generator of sorts in one corner of the room, it looked cobbled together from bits and pieces. It seemed powered by gasoline, complete with an exhaust pipe leading out of the room, out of the house in fact.*

The room seemed dark by our standards, lit by a pair of flickering floresent bulbs, but for a cat's sensitive eyes, the half-light was probably perfect. It was still clear enough for a human to see by, just not clearly.

Despite a strong cat-smell, the room reasonably clean. 343-A apparently ate and fulfilled calls of nature outside his living quarters. Also present were several blankets and cushions, obviously a feline-sized substitute for chairs. Our cat obviously used the generator for more than just light, there was an electric heater, an old portable TV set with rabbit ears (which worked when Baily turned it on), and even a walkman radio/tapedeck. The set looked like it had been salvaged, as did the heater. How he had managed to haul all this junk in there, or steal the walkman and the gas he needed to run the generator, I've never been able to figure out.

Then there were the truly disturbing things in the room.

There was a full scale labrator; set up on wooden crates instead of tables. Oh, it was makeshift as it was possible for such a thing to be, old jars and glasses instead of test tubes, an alcohol lamp instead of the modern bunsen burners, kitchen measuring spoons, a kid's junior scientist

*Unlike the rat colony, this cat couldn't just splice into his neighbor's power line. The way he used electricity the man would get wise the when he saw the electric bill.

microscope. But the whole thing was as neat and well ordered as any lab I'd seen, and if the chemicals were stored in old babyfood jars, they had properly coded lables.

"The little bastard!" growled Baily. "He's set it up like an imitation of the Institute's lab. And look at those!"

On one crate, apart from the others, lay a bottle of rubbing alcohol, a pile of cotton balls, and, in a sterile container, several hollow needles of the sort used to make bloodtests...veterinary size.

"That's how he was able to do it, the son of a bitch! He didn't need a full sized lab and the expensive chemicals. The serum replicates itself in his body. He's manufacturing the stuff from his own blood!"

Then there was the bookshelf. A single small low one. Some of the books were on chemistry and veterinary medicine, natural enough for a scientist. But the others...

"Frankenstein" read off Baily. "The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu. Stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde. These Will Chill You.

"God Almighty, Richardson, there all horror and science fiction. He's been filling his head with garbage about monsters and fiends and...we haven't produced the Frankenstein monster, we've turned out a mad scientist!

"He's using the knowledge we've programed into him to perform the same experiment! Only he's not doing it under supervised circumstances, with safety precautions. He's using it to mass produce monsters like himself, to turn loose on humanity. He's no doubt having the time of his life, playing at being the sort of fiend he's read about in those damn books!"

"No more a fiend than any scientist I've ever met," came a voice from above us. It was high, lisping, inhuman. Out of a cartoon cat it might have been amusing. From the real cat, staring down at us from the trapdoor in the ceiling it was something quite scary.

Baily, being Baily, drew his gun and rushed the a cat, and I ran after Baily, trying to stop him from killing a creature that would have been in--valuable to science. So we both went through the floor as we reached the shaft.

Yes, it was a deliberate trap. No fancy hinged trap door, no sliding panels, just a section of floor so deliberately weakened that it could bear the weight of a cat, but not a man. So down we went, crashing into the cellar. I cut my leg on a piece of jagged wood, pretty good in fact. By the time we got out of the house my pants leg was red with blood, and the wound needed seven stitches to close. Aside from some minor cuts and bruises Baily came through okay. Mercifully the cellar ceiling was low and the fall slowed by passing through the floor. Had either of us broken bones or sprained something I doubt we would've gotten out of there alive.

Aching, shocked and wet (for there were several inches of water on the cellar floor), we still were unprepared for what happened next.

It wasn't much, just the sound of a cat laughing. A hideous, diabolical laugh, a gleeful cackle worthy of Baily's "mad scientist".

"Perfect," our captor called out between ghastly peels of laughter. "It couldn't have worked better. I always wanted to see whether my human-trap would work!"

"Let us out of here, you damn cat!" roared Baily.

"But I'm not a cat anymore!" answered the feline, still chuckling. "I'm a mad scientist now, thanks to your Institute. And a better one than the humans who made me. My experiments have never killed any of my subjects. Can you at NIMH say that? I've aided dozens of cats during the twenty months

I've been here. Put them on equal footing with humans, and with considerably less fuss and pain than you did with me. It was an inspiration...do you realize all it takes is two vials of my blood and I can synthesize enough of your formula to change a normal cat into something like me? I'm a great humanitarian, I am...to cats."

"Humanitarian?" screamed Baily. "What about Rudwin? He has one eye, now because of you...and a face that makes people shudder."

"One eye, you say. Pity, I was trying to get both. After all, I did understand what you were talking about. I knew you were going to vivisect me, that if Rudwin put me under with that needle I'd never wake up. I have the right to defend myself against an enemy, don't I?"

"He wasn't your enemy, he was a scientist performing an experiment. He had nothing personal against him, you were just-"

"Experimental Subject number 343 dash A. That's right. I was that number. Now I call myself Moreau, after one of my heroes. He gave animals human intelligence too, if you've read the story. "

"A lunatic, like yourself!"

"Stop egging him on!" I grumbled at Baily as I tried to staunch my wound.

"A lunatic? You think me mad?" ranted Moreau. "Yet someday I the cats will recognize me as a benefactor of my whole race. Twenty months I've striven here. Tiberius- the one you killed, was only one of many. And I'll make many more, before I'm done."

"We'll stop you! Once an for all, we'll stop you! And we'll hunt down every one of those monstrosities you've spawned!"

Moreau laughed again.

"Not if I stop you two first!" he mocked.

Then the true madness started.

There was the sound of machinery as a ventilator shaft we hadn't noticed before opened up. Then a column of white powder came shooting out into the water, making a hissing sound as it hit. Baily and I smelled the acrid scent at the same time.

"Chlorine gas," said Baily. He did not say it loudly, with all sorts of threats against the creature who called himself Moreau. He said it dully, automatically. The realization that the creature he had hated and hunted so ferociously was both capable of and willing to kill him had shocked him into a state of calm.

Need I say that the exit to the cellar was crudely but solidly boarded up?

"I take my leave now," called out Moreau. "I'll be back to air the place out once the chlorine's done it's work. But here's something to amuse you during your final moments."

The music started blasting down then. He must have dragged the walkman over to the hole and turned it on full blast. The music was strangely ap--propriate. Tense, active, suspenseful. I almost became hysterical as I identified it. I'd heard it played dozens of times in old Universal horror movies and serials in melodramatic situations like this one.

I'll say this for Baily, he thought fast. As the gas started to choke me and burn my throat he gasped: "Quick, Richardson. Get on my shoulders. I can boost you high enough to get you up to the hole in the ceiling."

I complied without argument. Choking is a painful way to die.

I was afraid that Moreau would be waiting for me as I climbed out of the cellar, ready to go for me with his claws. But Moreau had realized that

the gas would rise up into his laboratory, he wasn't present. Very aware of my bleeding leg, I lay on my belly in front of the hole and extended both my hands down into it. Baily grabbed them. I managed to drag him out, using strength I never knew I had. We both collapsed, choked and exhausted.

"He almost got us," gasped Baily between racking coughs. "He almost got us!"

"And we'd better get out of here," I answered. "That stuff is rising up through the floor."

Something fell from from the ceiling and smashed on the floor. It was a large glass jar, full of liquid. The smell left no doubt it was gasoline.

Baily grabbed up his gun, it had been left lying on the floor where he'd dropped it. I looked up to see Moreau glaring down at us from one of his rooftop exit. He had a matchbox in his hands, was clumsily trying to strike a wooden match.

Both our darts missed him as several lit matches came floating down.

We both shot out of room as it went up. Moreau must have known the game was up, and, in best mad scientist tradition, he was destroying his lab with all it's incriminating evidence. He was dedicated, I'll say that. I could not have sacrificed all the goods I owned in the world, goods I valued highly, from the looks of the room, so quickly.

As we shot out of that death-trap of a house I tripped on the steps and tumbled onto the path. As I got up I heard Baily laughing, laughing as in--sanely as Moreau had.

"Look!" he screamed. "That little bastard's so clever. So clever he's caught himself!"

He gestured with his gun to a tree by the house.

"That's his exit off the roof. The only exit off the roof! Too high even for a goddamned super-cat to jump! And he's still up there. I can see him."

I could make out the cat on the roof as well, dodging back and forth, looking for a way off that did not bring him into pistol range. Somehow I felt no pleasure at Moreau's predicament, despite what he'd tried to do to us. Just...dare I say it?...pity for a trapped animal, or perhaps for an intelligent being about to die.

"We've got him. The house is going up-hear that roar in there. He's got the choice...smoke, fire, or the tree. And if he tries the tree, I'll get him.

"Yeah, we got you, in spite of all your clever traps and tricks! You're the one who's trapped now. Cat, your done! Yes, cat! Not Moreau, that's a man's name! You're nothing but a lousy cat with no name. A cat! A...NO!!!"

Baily had a better view of the roof from where he stood than I had. I had no idea what was going on until I heard the twang and Baily collapsed. I saw the bolt sticking out of his shoulder. As I ran to help him I saw Moreau drop the weapon, shinney down the tree and flee. I could not be sure, but I swear he had a sheath of papers clenched in his teeth. A scientist still, saving his notes at the risk of his own life.

Baily lay in a pool of blood, gasping, "Must stop him...menace...kill... ever cat...menace...take over the world...humans...won't have a chance...

I managed to drag him away from the burning house and call the ambulance. I was in no great shape myself by the time they got there. I needed a pint of blood and stitches. Baily-well, they tell me he'll be able to use his arm again but he'll never regain the full strength in it. He was lucky, Moreau was probably aiming it at his heart.

The weapon-it was a small but incredibly powerful crossbow- was the only thing we managed to salvage for the Institute. There must have been a lot of gasoline in that lab, or else the house was old and dry. Nothing but useless bits of metal and charred wood was all that was left of the makeshift lab.

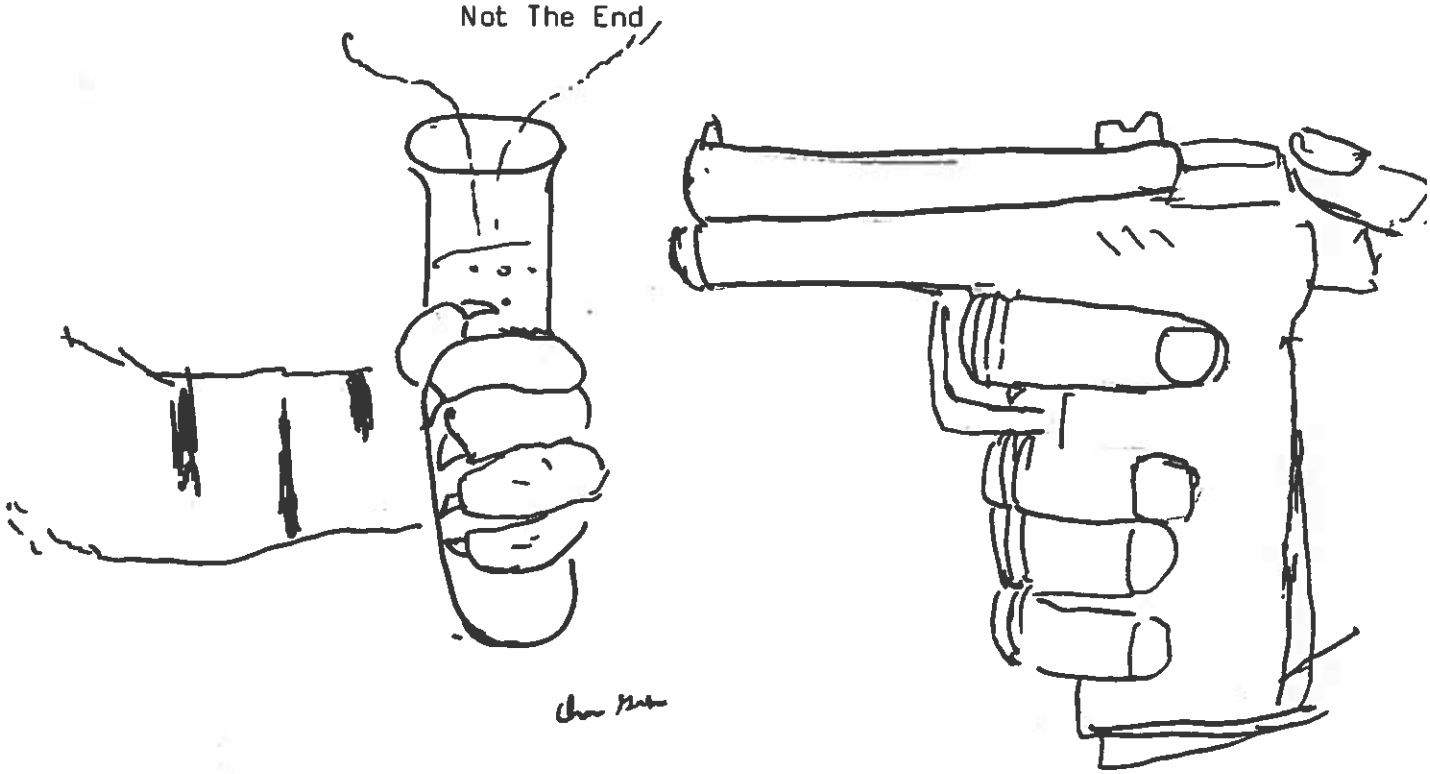
By the time the Institute was notified, Moreau was gone. So had a great many other cats in the neighborhood, he must've stayed long enough to spread the word. Aside from Tiberius's body, we did not recover any of Moreau's children.

I suppose I should hate him. He tried to kill me, crippled my partner, he's a menace to humans with his knowledge and his goals. He's a lunatic by our standards. A creature that imitates human villains, and does it as well as Moreau does, logically ought to be hated.

But I can't. He's suffered too much at the hands of "decent" human scientists to have any love for man, or believe a scientist is anything else but a horror movie fiend. He does seem to have a strange love for his fellow cats, a strange trait in a member of a notoriously selfish species. And he has a noble purpose, like all mad scientists, to benefit his race. His methods might be warped and ruthless, but in his own way he is helping.

While I look the other way when innocent creatures are tortured at the place I work, all in the name of science. I hunt down intelligent beings who've escaped from a hell on earth, because it's my job, "I'm only following orders." I give way to Baily and let him kill animals and bully humans so I won't make trouble.

Who am I to look down on Moreau, who at least is heroic in his wicked--ness?



NIMH NOTES #1
"Questions & Answers"

by John Cawley
PO Box 1582, Burbank, CA 91507

In the summer of 1983, I was hired by the Bluth team as Director of Public Relations. (At that time, they were working under the banner of Bluth Group and producing videogames.) One of my functions was to handle fan mail. Most of this mail fell into two catagories: They were the "gimmies" or the "help."

"Gimmies" always wanted something or other. Some wanted an autograph, drawing, or photo. Some had an "important" question that needed to be answered (like how old was Don, what was it like working at Disney, what was his favorite Disney movie, why did he stop making features, was he working on this or that title of film, was there going to be a NIMH sequel, etc.). Some merely wanted to be "friends" with Don (usually because, as they stated, they had no other friends who understood them).

The "Helps" always wanted to help. They offered advice on how to do the next picture, or specific titles. Some sent scripts, characters etc. for use in future games, films, etc. Others sent resumes for any number of positions. In this group were those who simply wanted to write and help by giving moral support. As one had written, "I don't care if NIMH was a flop, I liked it." Another commented that even though NIMH was a "low budget picture, it usually didn't show." One stated that a jazz score would have made the film more successful.

However, occasionally a letter came in that was more... interesting? (No, many letters were interesting.) More... serious? (No, almost all the writers of fan mail are serious!) I guess "mature" is the word that would fit. (Very little fan mail comes across mature... even those letters written by fans in their sixties!)

One such mature letter was accompanied by a box of some 50 children's letters. It seems a class in New York had taken the time to read Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH and then seen the film, THE SECRET OF NIMH. They then each wrote down five questions regarding the differences found between the two works. The questions ranged from logical (why the name change) to the obscure (did we want to put Disney characters in the story).

The following reply explains the rest.

Oh, after the letter are some questions of interest to true NIHMphomaniacs. I hope you enjoy them.

Sincerely,

John Cawley

DON BLUTH ANIMATION

12229 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, California 91604 • (213) 506-5440

December 7, 1983

[redacted]

RE: Story Differences in THE SECRET OF NIMH

Dear [redacted] & Students:

I want to thank you not only for taking the time to study the differences between our production of THE SECRET OF NIMH and the novel, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, but for letting us assist in the answering of some of the questions raised. We apologize for the delay in answering, but we only recently received your packet of letters from MGM/UA.

The students asked many questions, but generally seemed to focus in on the same topics. Having discussed them with Don Bluth, John Pomeroy, Gary Goldman, and Will Finn (the authors of the script), here are the answers to most (and the most frequently asked) questions.

THE NAME CHANGE

We had originally planned to use the name Mrs. Frisby in the film, and even had the dialogue recorded that way. However, Whammo Toys, maker of the plastic Frisbee, claimed to have control over the name through Trademark. (Unlike a copyright law which must show that you have exactly copied an item, trademarks also control the "sound" of the name.) For this reason, the name was changed to "Brisby," and much of the dialogue had to be re-recorded for the film.

THE AMULET

The amulet was a device, or symbol, to represent the internal power of Mrs. Brisby. It also was a gift from her husband, a sign of his love. The stone/amulet had no real

- more -

DRAGON'S LAIR
ANIMATED INTERACTIVE ARCADE GAME

© Don Bluth 1983

power, itself. It was only when Mrs. Brisby's strength was employed that it could become a force. In many ways, it was an extension of Mrs. Brisby... a visual extension of an internal (and harder to show in a film) power.

NICODEMUS AS WIZARD

This change was made to create more "mystery" around both Nicodemus and the entire rat colony. Once again, making Mrs. Brisby have to search both outwards, and inwardly for help.

MAKING JENNER EVIL

In the book, Jenner is actually a traitor who simply leaves. In the film, he becomes a more dramatic figure be being a visible enemy. (Like many changes made when books become movies, the change is chosen to add drama to the story.)

THE DEATH OF NICODEMUS

Again, to help develop characters, some changes need to be made. Nicodemus must die so that Justin can become the new leader of the rats. Without this action, Justin doesn't have the ability to grow and change in the film. Each character needs a direction.

JEREMY'S LARGER ROLE

Jeremy, the crow, was given a larger role because his character had a great deal of entertainment value. (Visual material is preferred in films.) Also Dom DeLuise, the voice of Jeremy, desired a larger part to help develop the character more fully.

JUSTIN DOES NOT SAVE MRS. BRISBY FROM CAGE
THE CLIMAX IS CHANGED
THE ROSEBUSH IS NOT DUG UP

All these have to do with storytelling and character development. THE SECRET OF NIMH is really a story about Mrs. Brisby and her need to save her children. If the rats save her children, then she hasn't grown in the film (see why Nicodemus dies, above). If the climax is more concerned with the rats and the rosebush, then Brisby's trouble/problem (the main reason for the story happening) has less importance.

WHY IS MR. AGES MEAN

If you really watch the film closely, you'll see the Ages is not truely a mean character. He may be too busy with science to pay close attention to other's problems, and he may be getting cranky in his old age, but he does help Brisby. In fact, it is Ages who

gives Brisby the medicine for Timothy. It is also he who leads her to the rats in the rosebush. Ages, in many ways, shows that just because someone seems too busy to be friendly all the time, does not mean they don't care, or are not friendly.

TOY TINKER & OTHER MISSING ELEMENTS

There are many sections of the novel which were not used at all. This is usually due to the lack of time. When you write a book, you have the ability to use as much time as you like. (The same when you read a book.) A book can take days, or weeks to finish. A movie must tell the entire story in less than 2 hours. (You can do longer movies, but 90-120 minutes is the usual length for live-action films; 65-85 for animation.)

For this reason, most stories must be made shorter and condensed. You can't expect a viewer to follow dozens of story lines and characters. What is usually done, is that one is picked out and highlighted. In NIMH, we chose the story of Brisby. Everything in the film had to relate to her story, and her character. At the same time, characters around her needed to be shown... but only those who would assist her in growing: her children, who force her to seek courage; The Shrew and Ages, who help guide her; Jeremy, her initial support (who she later proves she does not need); Nicodemus and the Owl, together who show her the strength she possess; and Justin and Jenner, showing how inner power has both a positive and negative side.

I'm sorry I didn't have time to answer each student's question personally, but hope these answers will help. However, I have enclosed a copy of our Studio newsletter, Exposure Sheet, for each of the students. I hope they enjoy them.

Once again, thanks for taking the time to evaluate our film, and for sharing your class's enthusiasm for it.

Sincerely,

John Cawley
Director of Public Relations

JC:af
Encls/

AFTER THOUGHTS...

"The Ladies of NIMH"

While travelling to conventions for the Bluth team, and answering the fan mail, one question always seemed to pop up: Why weren't there any female rats? Well, there were.

Studio members used to proclaim that you could detect females in the shots of the house raising (at the end). However, in reality (if animation is reality), the scenes detailing the female rats of NIMH were left on the cutting room floor. In the need to shorten the film, to keep it within a manageable time and budget, several sequences were cut.

According to early story notes, synopses and scripts, the key female scene in NIMH was to take place in the rat's library as Mrs. Brisby awaited to see Nicodemus. There she met Isabella. Described as "flighty," Isabella at first is suspicious of Brisby (an outsider), but soon becomes friendly to her. It is Isabella who explains where the rats received their powers. (Nicodemus takes over this role in the final cut.) Isabella is also seen helping several male rats with wounds from alleged battles with the Farmer, elements, etc. Some story notes indicate she might have been planned as a true romantic interest for Justin.

Being a lone female, without any real lock into the film's main events, it is easy to see how she was dropped to give the key characters more space and dialogue. However, by dropping the only female rat, a one sided (and occasionally suspicious) view of the rat's lives is seen.

"The Hidden NIMH"

One afternoon while talking with Don and John, I was asked some intriguing questions about the film and it's "hidden" meaning.

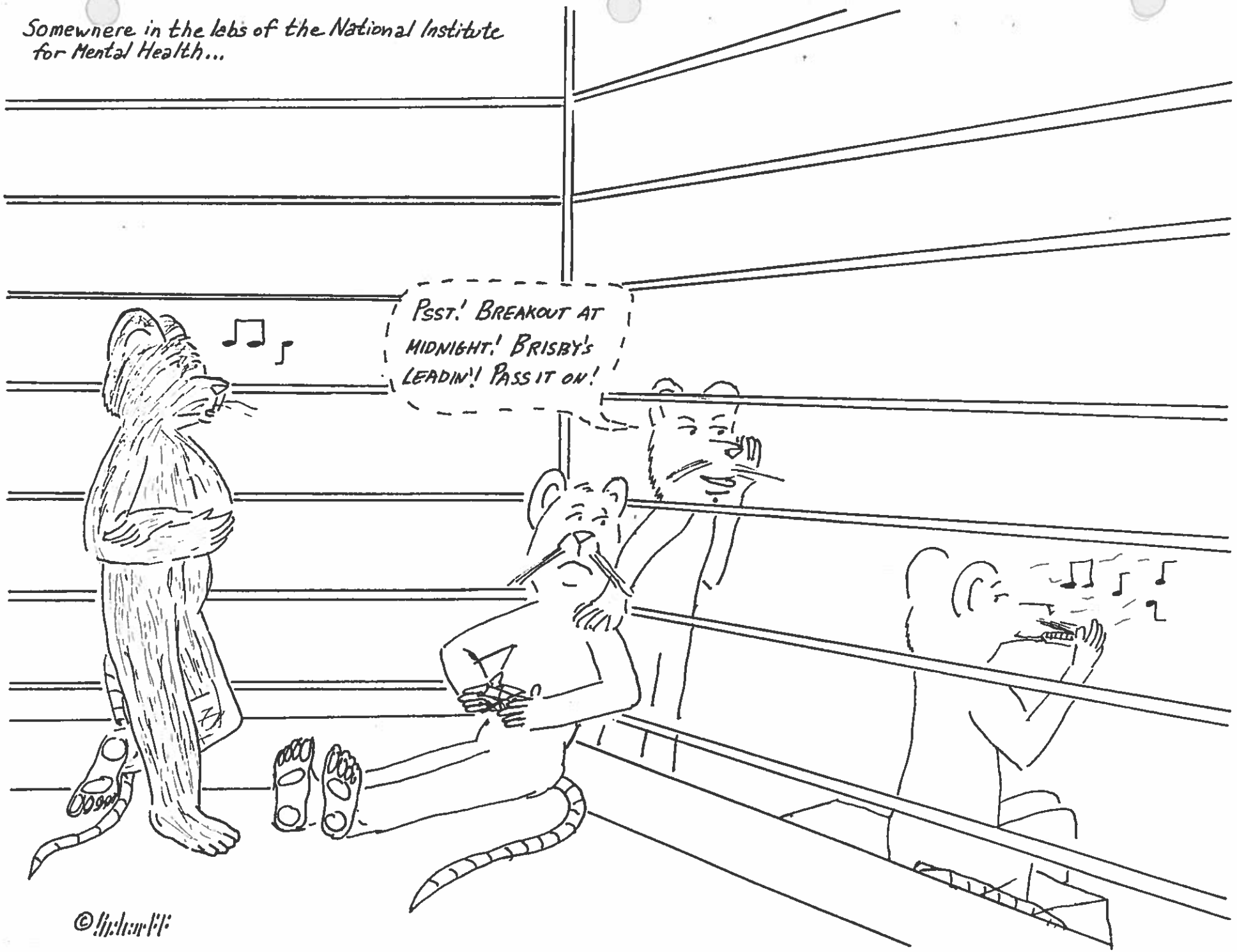
They asked if I'd ever noticed that Nicodemus and the Owl both walked with a limp and had glowing eyes. I said I noticed the eyes, but not the limp. It was then explained that these two characters might be, in fact, "the same character in different forms."

I was then asked if I'd noticed that no one outside of Brisby and Ages ever "saw" the rats as she did? "As she did...?" I questioned. It seems that the only times we see the rats in their full costumes and props are when Mrs. Brisby and Ages are around. We never view Jeremy, the children, the shrew, etc. see any of the rats. "Isn't it plausible," asked John, "that the entire set up of the lavish clothes, the elegant chambers, the amulet's power, etc. were nothing more than an imgage given to Brisby to assist her in finding the strength she had inside of her. We know the rats had powers... just how great were those powers?"

We never got around to discussing these points again. Did any of you notice these "hidden elements?"

***

John Cawley is currently Director of US Operations for VIZ Communications, a division of Japan's Shogakukan Publishing Company. He was previously Production Coordinator of Sullivan Studios, where Don Bluth's upcoming feature (AN AMERICAN TAIL) was produced with Steven Spielberg.


Somewnere in the labs of the National Institute for Mental Health...
PSST.! BREAKOUT AT MIDNIGHT.! BRISBY'S LEADIN'! PASS IT ON!

The Secret of YAMATO

by Colleen Winters

Derek Wildstar looked down at the small, furry creature he held in the palm of his hand, his eyes uncharacteristically soft. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your keeping an eye on Captain Avatar, Mrs. Brisby. He wouldn't stand for Doctor Sane hovering over him, but you're a lot less noticable than the Doctor! It makes me feel better inside to know someone is looking after him."

Mrs. Brisby, a brown field mouse wearing a ragged red cape and an expression of motherly concern, looked at her feet and coughed to cover her embarassment. "Ahem! Well, Derek, it's the very least I could do. You've all been so very kind to us, after my grandchildren and I appeared so sudden-like. The last thing I expected to find were humans who could understand us and make us welcome. You have no idea what a relief that was!"

Derek nodded. He could scarcely begin to imagine what life must be like for a group of super-intelligent mice caught in a human's world, but he suspicioned it was not easy.

"And besides, we all owe Captain Avatar so much. If it weren't for him, we never could have gotten all the way to Iskandar the way we did. I've never met a finer human being; I guess that's the main reason my family and I will do all we can to protect him."

"No one can ask for more, Mrs. Brisby," he replied. Quietly, he opened the door to the Captain's cabin, striding softly around the bed and its sleeping occupant. With care he placed her on the bookshelf beside the bed (Mrs. Brisby having a comfortable home inside a hollowed-out book) and retraced his steps to the door. She gave him a cheerful wave as he exited, and Derek's concerned look eased into a smile as he shut the door behind him.

Once the young man had left, Mrs. Brisby trotted to the edge of the shelf and peered down at Avatar. With a worrrid sigh, she settled back on her haunches, shaking her head. Although very smart, Mrs. Brisby was still an animal, with an animal's sure senses. Senses which did not lie, no matter how sad the truth. Avatar was dying.

"Those wretched Gamilons! They're worrying him into an early grave! If only they'll leave us alone now that we're heading home--perhaps the Captain could see Earth one more time. If he has enough rest, if he's undisturbed, if.." Mrs. Brisby clenched her small hands into fists. Her blue eyes flashed and her face set in determination. Marching into her little "cabin," she lifted from a tiny table a radio the size of a postage stamp. Thumbing the com-switch, she spoke into it. "Johnathan? This is Grandma. Listen, dear heart, the Captain is very poorly and mustn't be bothered by anything...or anyone. Gather the other children and prepare for the unexpected, will you?"

"D'you think the Gamilons will attack again, Grandma?" The youthful voice was perky and eager.

"I'm not sure, honey...it's just a feeling I have," she answered quietly. "I'd like us to be ready, just in case."

"No sweat, Grandma! You take care of the Captain up there, and me and the gang will handle the rest down here. Don't worry. We'll think of something! Johnathan out."

Mrs. Brisby could have sworn, just before the connection was broken, that she heard a laugh of pure delight from her grandson. She sighed, smiled and thought [Another daredevil, just like his late grandsire!]

Johnathan Brisby shook some of his unruly mane out of his eyes. Then, with paws on hips, he addressed his five cousins in this fashion. "Allright folks. Grandma has a hunch the Gamilons will be calling on us, and she says the Captain needs peace and quiet. The humans are gonna be too busy trying to save the ship; so that leaves us with the job of making sure no one bothers the Old Man."

"And just how are we going to do that, Johnathan?" asked Erika, the youngest of the group. "The Gamilons are Big People. Will they stop if we stand in front of them and shout 'Halt!'?"

Drifting toward them, its winding sheets billowing, was a ghost. Its hollow eyes glared with dark menace, its arms gestured threateningly. Blaster fire did not slow it, but finally it vanished just before reaching the Gamilons. Quite before they could recover from the initial fright, something else entered the corridor. It was a huge, reptilian beast. All teeth and claws and yards of scaley, serpetine body. The dragon raised its horned head and bellowed at them.

As one, the Gamilons about-faced and ran for their lives.

In their cubbyhole at the hall's ending, two mice rejoiced. Margo leaned against a hologram projector and laughed and laughed. Nicodemus looked at the cakes of melting dry ice and said, "Thank goodness I play 'Dungeons and Dragons once a week!"

Desslok stood in the passageway--a tall, imposing figure, his cloak flagging in the wind created by the inrushing gas. He'd just enjoyed the pleasure of baiting Deputy-Captain Wildstar with his plans for attacking Earth with the captured Yamato. The Gamilon leader had then watched with satisfaction as the young Terran had had to retreat from the encroaching deadly clouds. Desslok smiled to himself. Victory was within his grasp at last and he savored it.

Johnathan Brisby sat on his mount just around the corner from the invaders. The Starforce personnel had all retreated before the gas. Johnathan didn't mind the fouled air, protected as he was. Indeed, he saw in its cloudy yellow vapor a convenient camoflage. The comm in his helmet crackled in his ears.

"Jon!" said Callista's breathless voice. "We've held the upper halls safe! Sandor says Nova has activated the Cosmo-DNA, so the gas will soon go away!"

Johnathan nodded. "When the gas goes, so will the Gamilons! We've almost won! We..." He broke off, suddenly realizing that Desslok was striding toward him, preceeded by an escort of soldiers.

"Uh uh, Mi-mi. Now's our chance to have a piece of the action! You ready?" The spotted mouse drew his needle-charged blaster and signalled the Doctor's cat. "Chaarge!!"

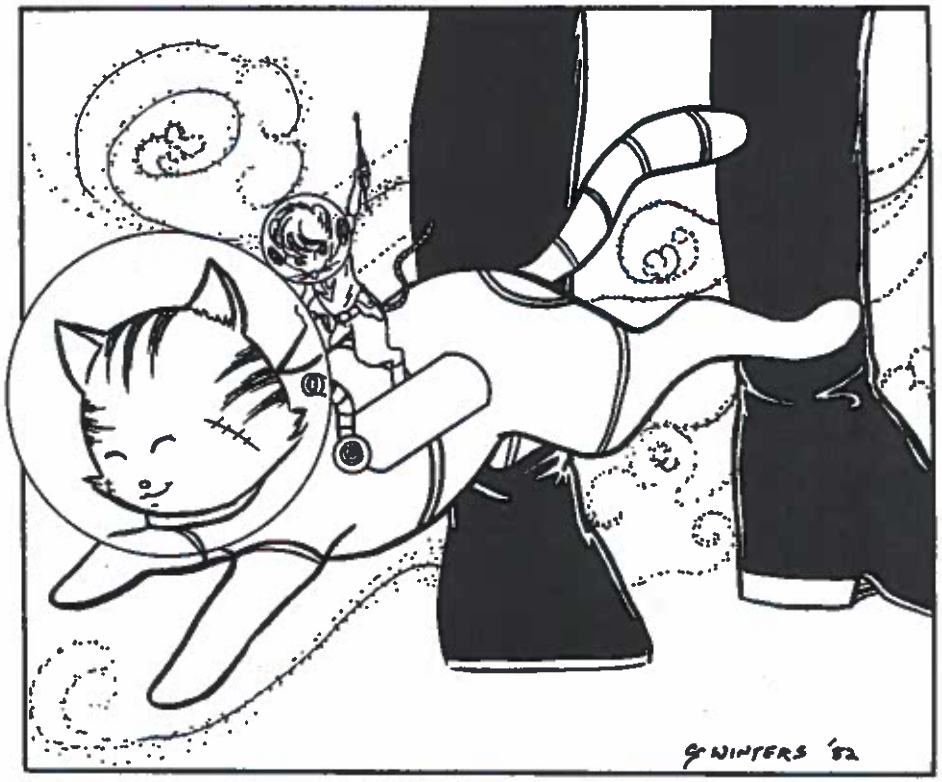
Together Johnathan and his odd steed galloped through the fog. Threading their way between the legs of unnoticing soldiers, they shot toward their goal: a pair of highly polished black boots. Grinning evilly, he levelled his blaster and squeezed the trigger.

"OUCH!" shrieked Desslok, hopping on one foot in a very undignified manner. A hot pain had pierced his right ankle, rendering him lame. Concerned, his men halted their advance. Then one of them noticed...

"Sir! The gas is disappearing!"

"They must have gotten to the Cosmo-DNA. Everyone back to the ship!" ordered Desslok. "We'll meet again Wildstar!" he vowed. Cursing under his breath, he hobbled back into the boarding tube and the safety of his flagship.

Later, as the ship's surgeon labored over removing a slick darning-needle from his ankle, Desslok wondered to himself. "Did I really see a tiny Starforcer, waving an equally tiny blaster, dash by on the back of a cat in a space-suit?!" He shook his head angrily. "It's all the Yamato's fault! That ship is driving me crazy!"



****

"The Secret of Yamato" was originally published in DIMENSIONALLY TRANSCENDENTAL. Reprinted with permission.

the real secret

DO YOU KNOW ME?

I USED TO BE A PRETTY BIG CHEESE IN HOLLYWOOD!

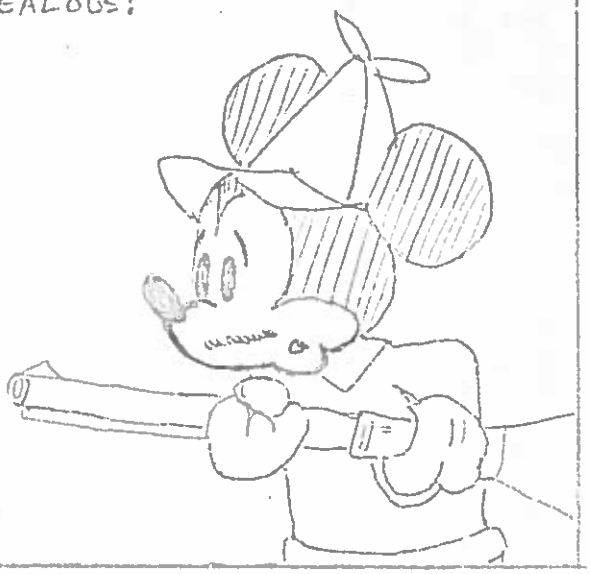
WORKED AT THE GREATEST ANIMATION STUDIO IN THE WORLD!

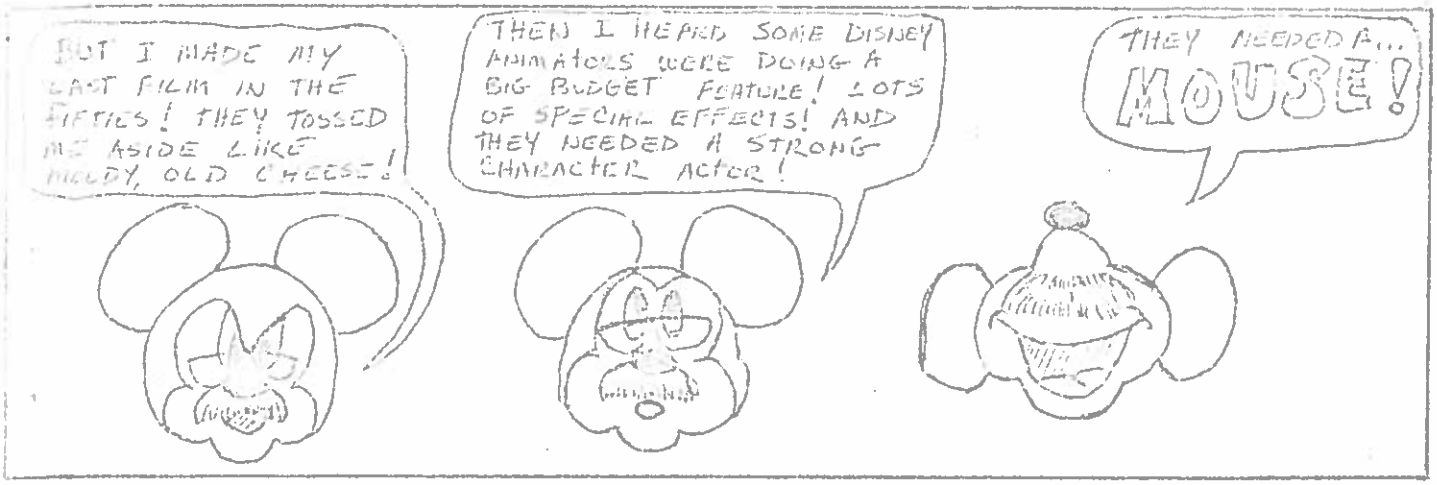
ALWAYS HAD THE FINEST ANIMATION AND STORIES! KINGS AND PRESIDENTS WOULD COME TO SEE ME!

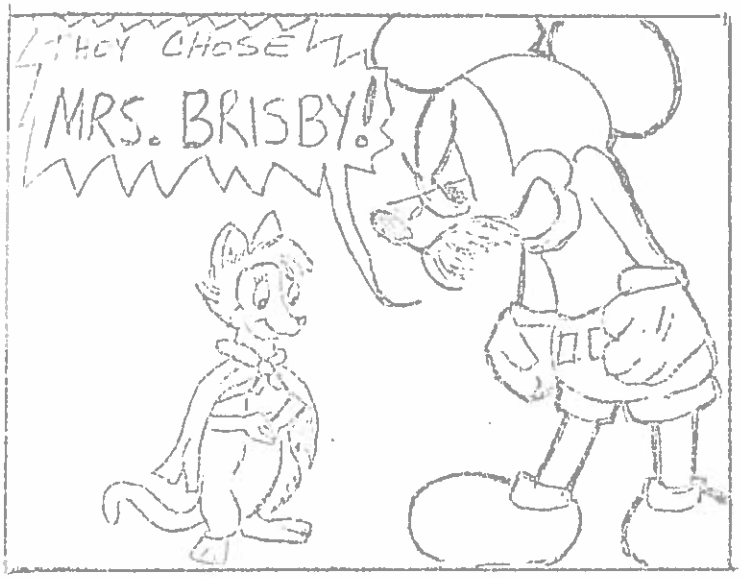
WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY
JIM KORKIS
MAY 1986

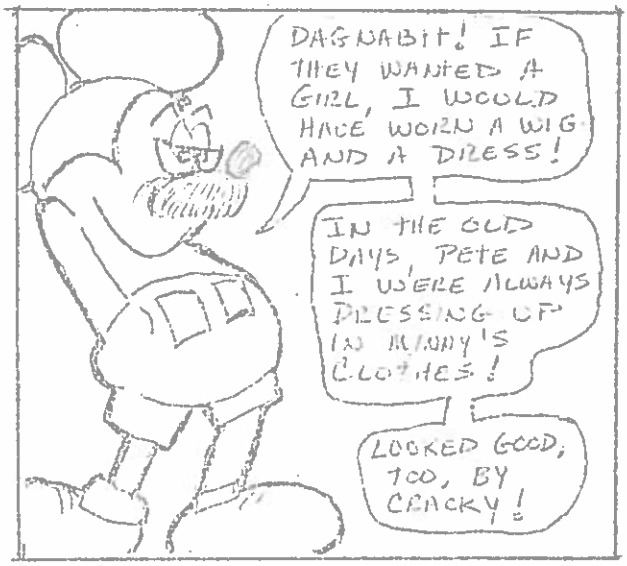
REMEMBER ME IN "THE MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT"? IT BECAME A BIG BOX OFFICE HIT! LOTS OF SPECIAL EFFECTS!

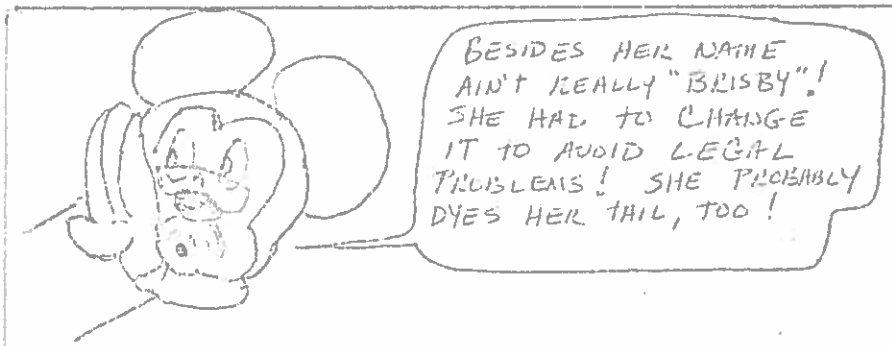
OR HOW ABOUT "THE HUNTER"? NICE BIT OF CHARACTER ACTING! EVEN BRANDO WAS JEALOUS!




BUT I MADE MY LAST FILM IN THE FIFTIES! THEY TOSSED ME ASIDE LIKE MOLDY, OLD CHEESE!
THEN I HEARD SOME DISNEY ANIMATORS WERE DOING A BIG BUDGET FEATURE! LOTS OF SPECIAL EFFECTS! AND THEY NEEDED A STRONG CHARACTER ACTOR!
THEY NEEDED A... MOUSE!




DAGNABIT! IF THEY WANTED A GIRL, I WOULD HAVE WORN A WIG AND A DRESS!
IN THE OLD DAYS, PETE AND I WERE ALWAYS DRESSING UP IN MOMMY'S CLOTHES!
LOOKED GOOD, TOO, BY CRACKY!



"As a kid, I always wanted to work at Disney. When I finally got there, I spent most of my time fighting about things instead of creating. I just want to put something on film that will enrich society."
---Don Bluth
quoted in the Feb/March 1981 FilmFan

The Real Secret is written and published by Jim Korkis, 707 West Doran, Glendale, California 91203 for Tim Fay's The Film File.

From a diary, May 12, 2068, Belonging to a field mouse named William.

In the distance I see the city of the Humans. Sometimes I wish...

But such wishes are idle dreams. Once, so my grandfather tells me, the humans hated and feared the mice and the rats that were of NIMH. Now, they do not care... much.

Something happened to them and they began to leave the world. Some of us were found - and instead of hate and war, there was amusement and then respect. But the elders say that we must not go to the City at the edge of the Valley. Soon the humans will all go away...

The elders want this, of course. They want the world-all-themselves, for us and us alone, and if the humans go, then we will have it. What does it matter if they all leave this world? More room to farm, to grow. Let them have their stars.

The humans say that they will take us if anyone of us wants to go.

Sometimes... But I am needed on the farm. My mother, my family would miss me...

Jerryn went...

I have <u>responsibilities!</u> <u>I cannot go</u>...

But I look at the stars and wonder. And think.

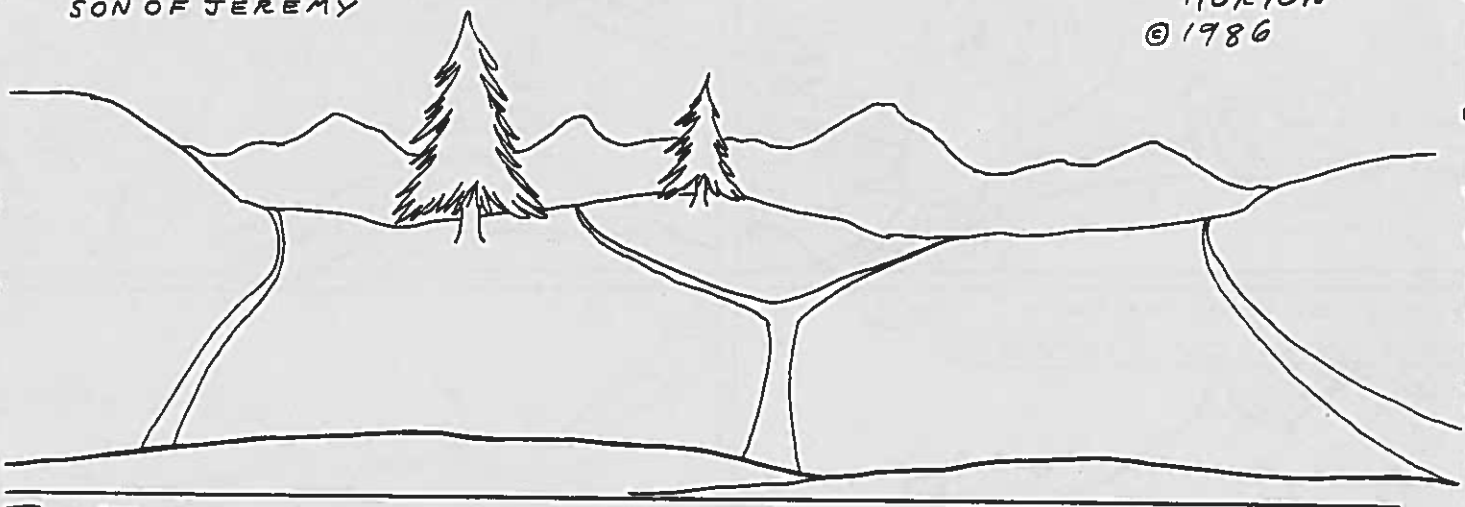
And sometimes I wish...

On July 17, 2068, William boarded the starship <u>Alaric</u>.

JASPER
SON OF JEREMY

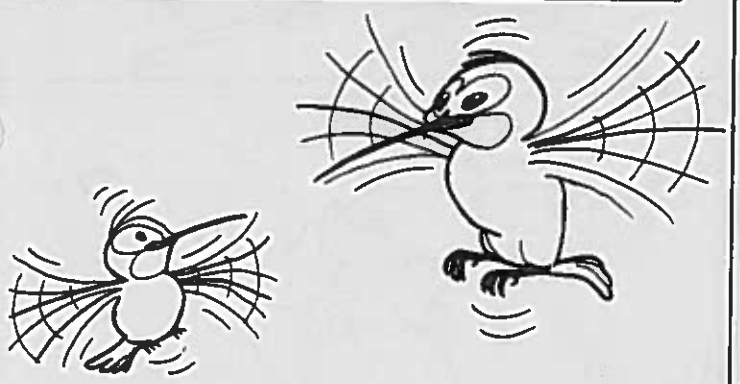
"A CROW ON THE WING"

STORY AND ART BY TRACY HORTON
©1986

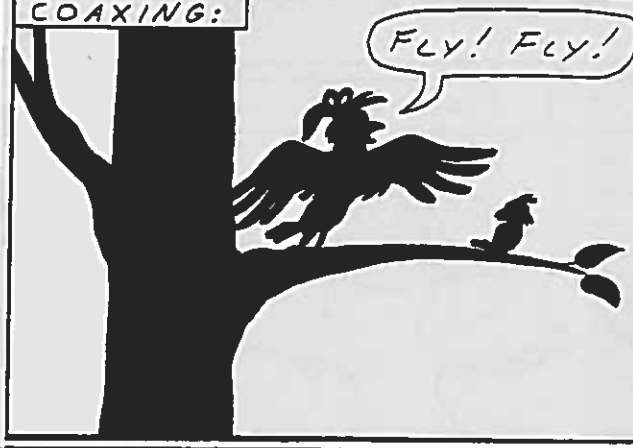


JUNE: THE MONTH WHEN FLEDGLINGS MUST LEARN FLIGHT.

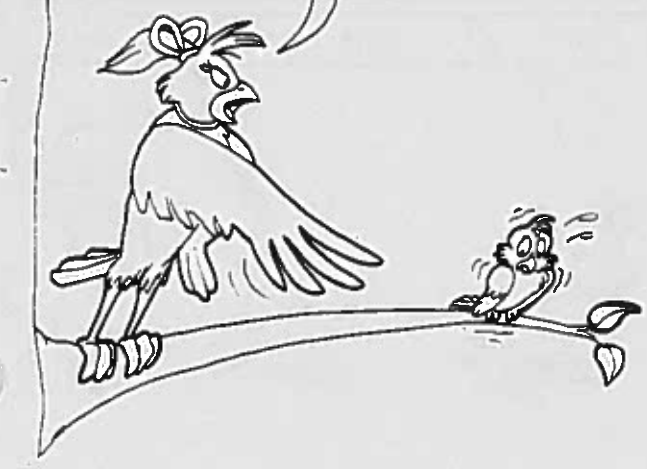
SOME YOUNGSTERS LEARN QUICKLY.



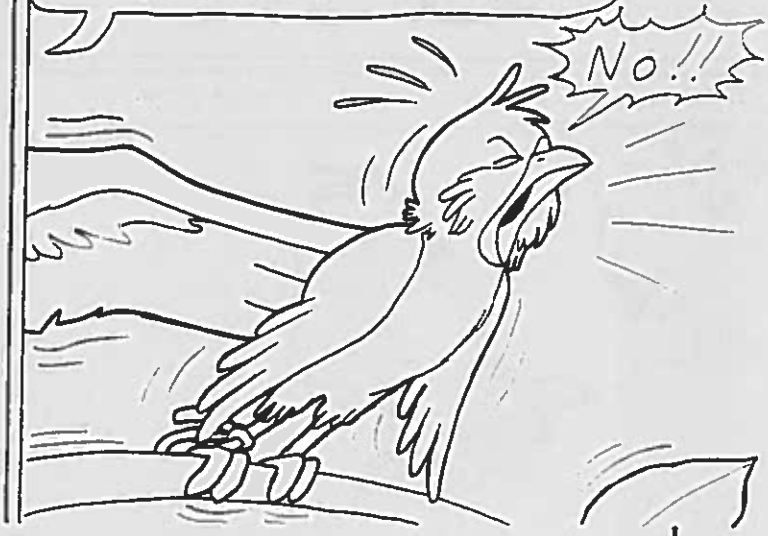
OTHERS, HOWEVER, NEED A BIT MORE COAXING:



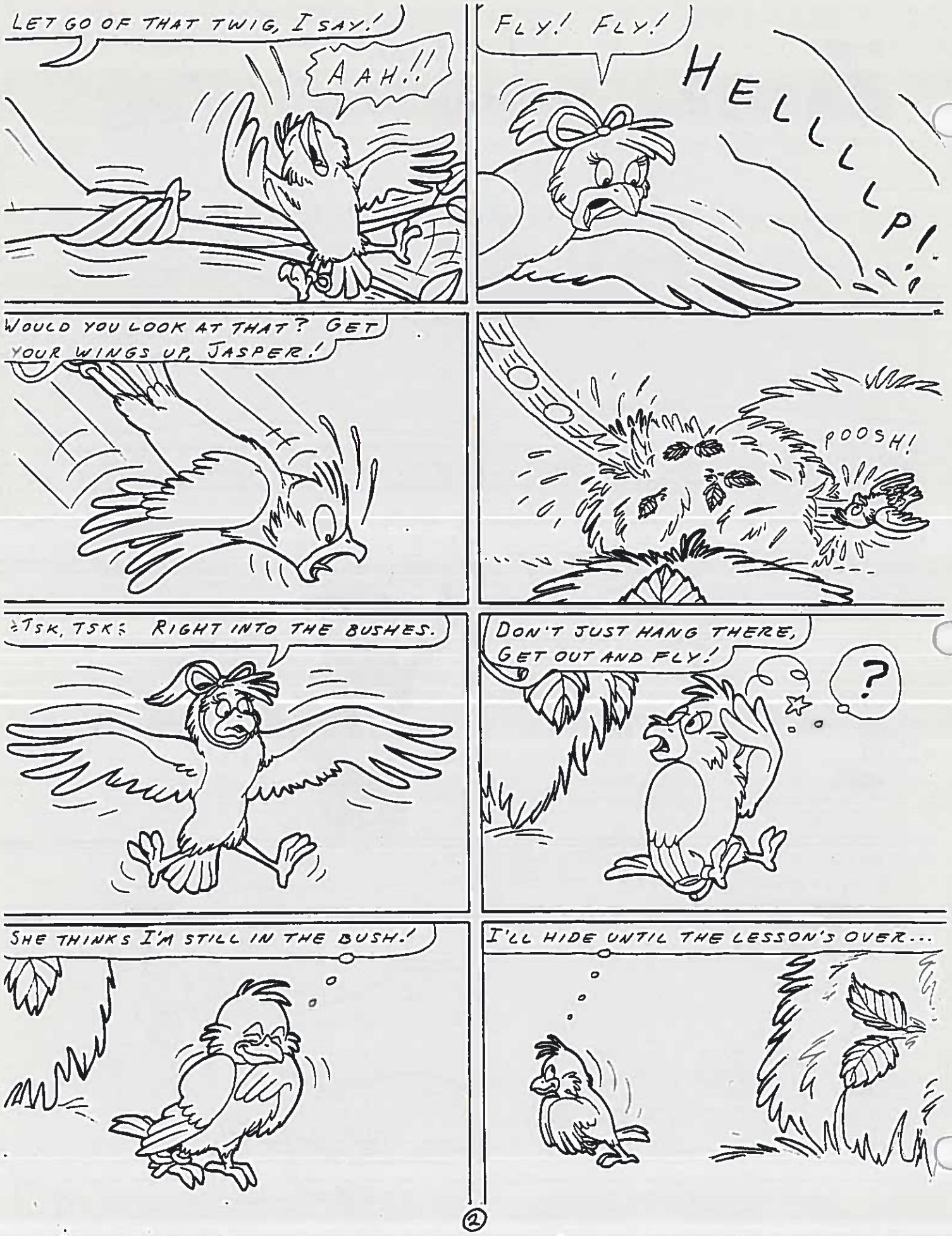
GET YOUR LAZY TAIL OFF THAT LIMB AND FLY, BOY, FLY!

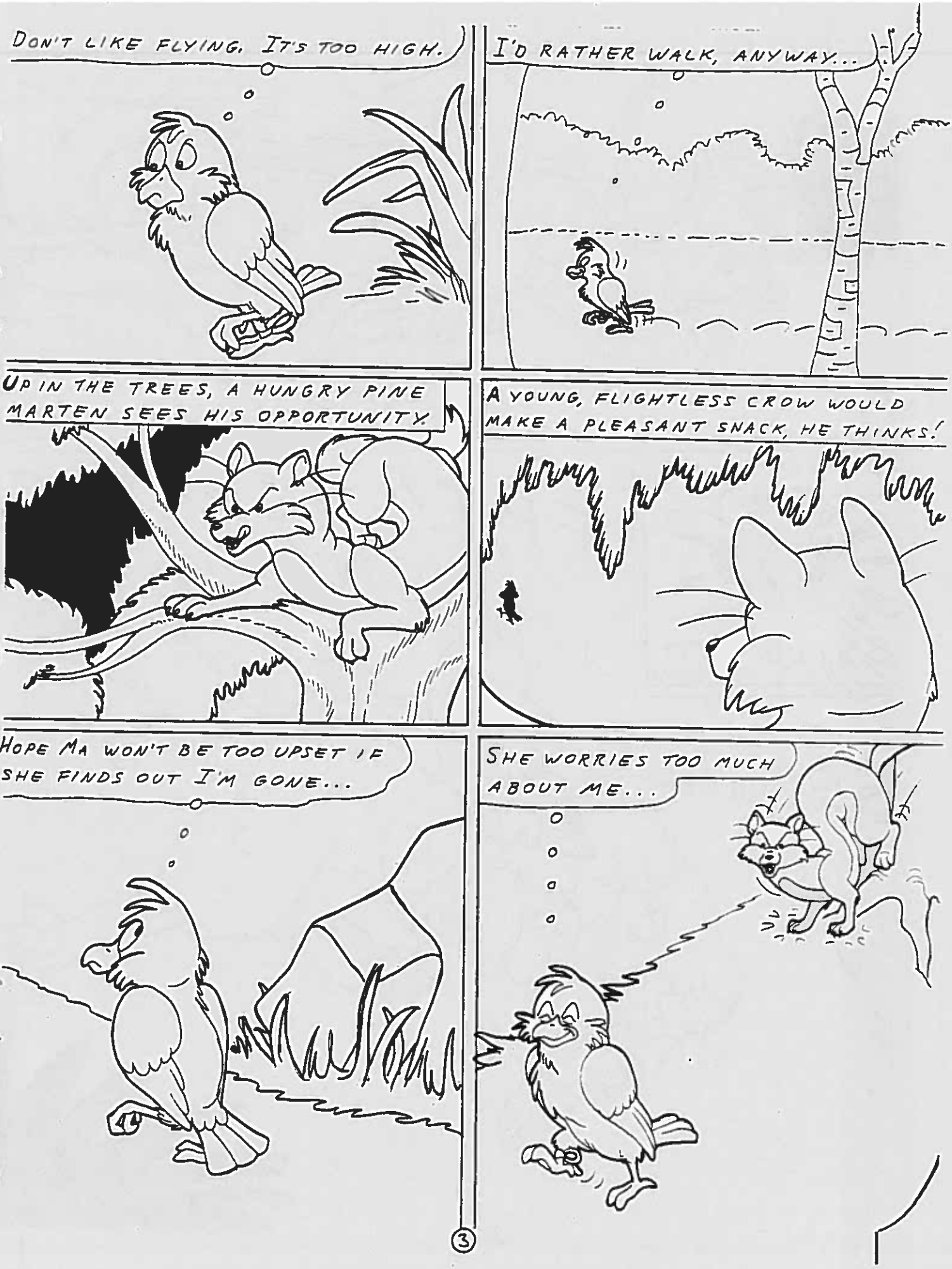


HERE, JASPER! GET OFF!

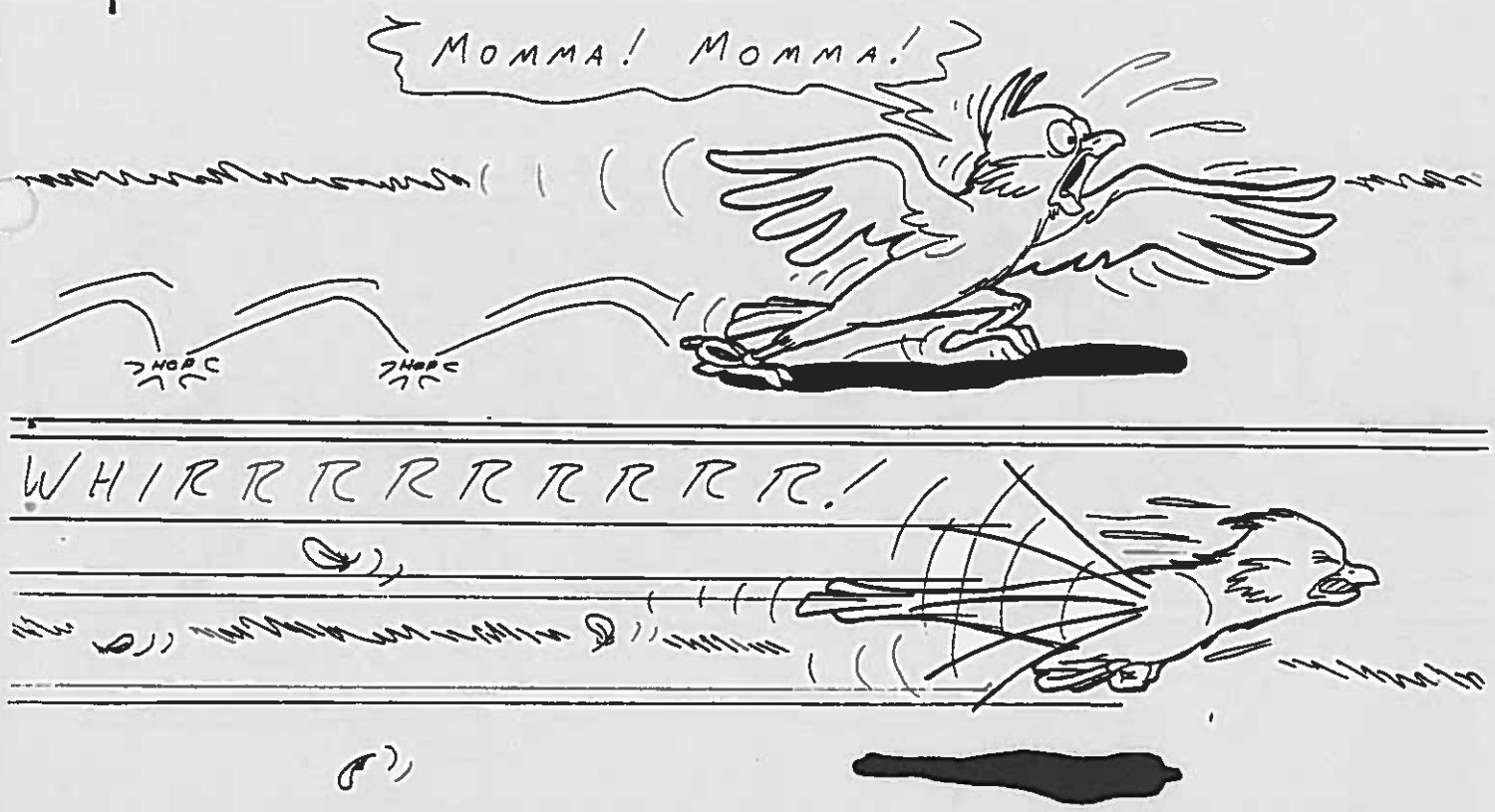


DON BLUTH CHARACTERS © MRS. BRISBY LTD.

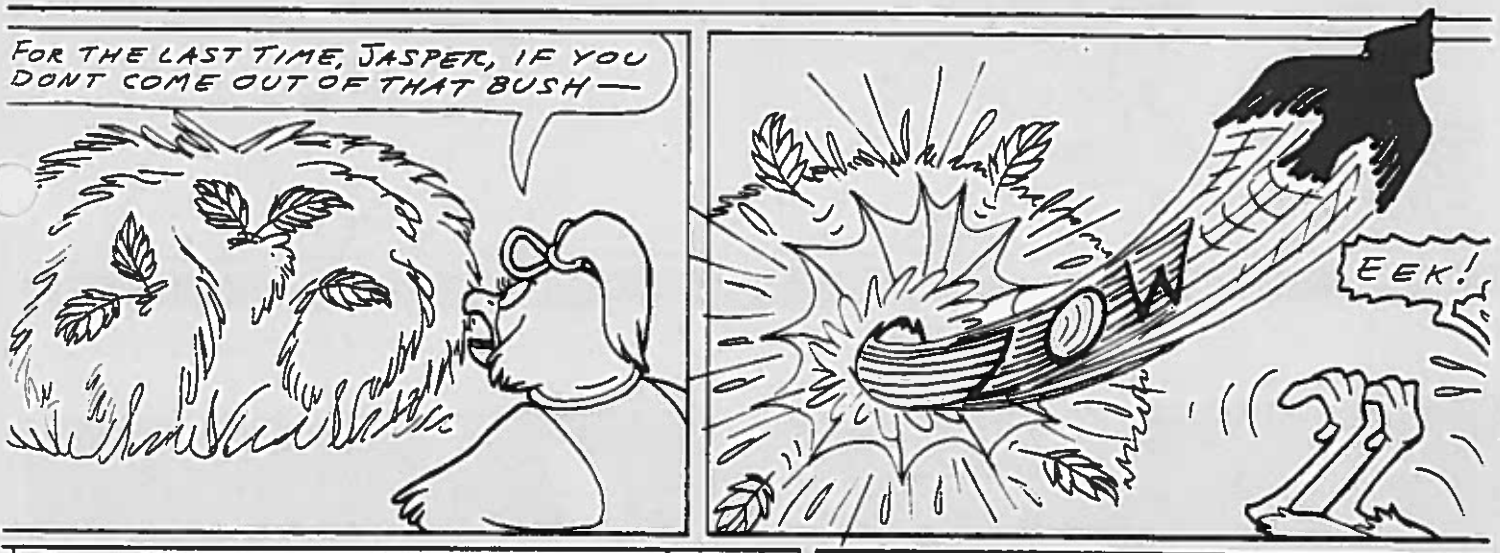

LET GO OF THAT TWIG, I SAY!
AAH!!
FLY! FLY!
HELLLLP!
WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT? GET YOUR WINGS UP, JASPER!
POOSH!
=TSK, TSK= RIGHT INTO THE BUSHES.
DON'T JUST HANG THERE, GET OUT AND FLY!
?
SHE THINKS I'M STILL IN THE BUSH!
I'LL HIDE UNTIL THE LESSON'S OVER...


DON'T LIKE FLYING. IT'S TOO HIGH.
I'D RATHER WALK, ANYWAY...
UP IN THE TREES, A HUNGRY PINE MARTEN SEES HIS OPPORTUNITY.
A YOUNG, FLIGHTLESS CROW WOULD MAKE A PLEASANT SNACK, HE THINKS!
HOPE MA WON'T BE TOO UPSET IF SHE FINDS OUT I'M GONE...
SHE WORRIES TOO MUCH ABOUT ME...
3

BUT THE POUNCE IS INTERRUPTED...
..BY THE ATTACK OF ANOTHER SAVAGE PREDATOR!
OH, GOLLY!!
FFT! SCREECH!
SNARL!
SSST!


MOMMA! MOMMA!
HOP
HOP

WHIRRRRRRRRRR!

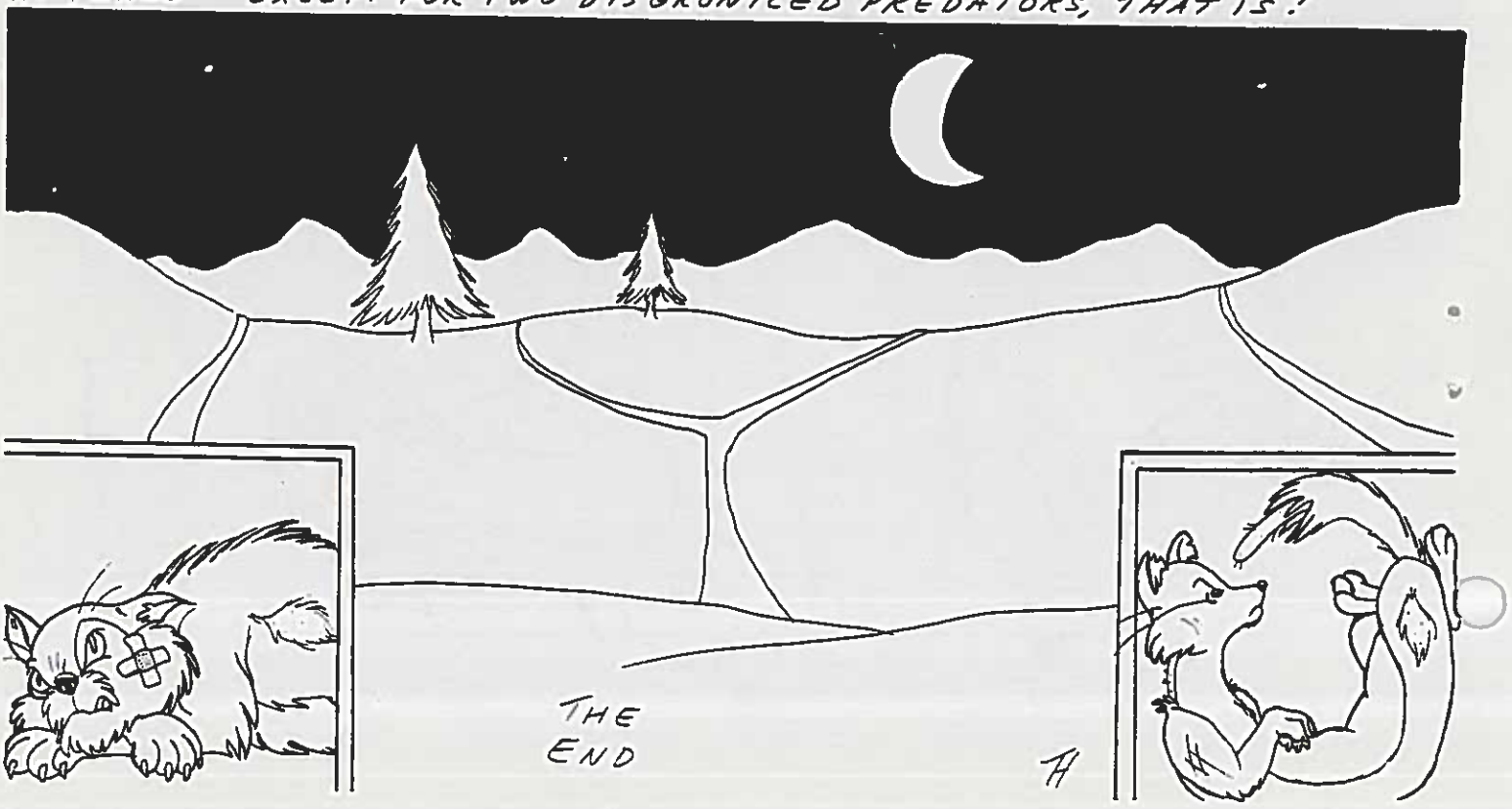

FOR THE LAST TIME, JASPER, IF YOU DONT COME OUT OF THAT BUSH—
EEK!

GOOD! VERY GOOD! KEEP IT UP!
:GASP, PANT:

OH, YOU POOR DEAR! YOU'VE OVER-EXERTED YOURSELF!
:WHEW!:

WHA...WHAZZAT—WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
OH, JEREMY!
JASPER FLEW ALL THE WAY UP HERE!
YEAH! I FLIED!
THAT'S GREAT, SON! I COULDN'T BE MORE PROUD!
TOMORROW YOUR OLD CROW'S GONNA TEACH YOU SOME FANCY FLYING!

NIGHT FALLS ON THE JUNE LANDSCAPE, AND ALL LIVING CREATURES ARE AT PEACE—EXCEPT FOR TWO DISGRUNTLED PREDATORS, THAT IS!



THE END

H

THE
"NIMH"
FILE
CARL LAFONG +
M. K. JEEVES '86